

## *Walking and rhythmicity: sensing urban space*

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### **Abstract**

As an inescapable part of our everyday lifeworld, walking is an embodied practice with specific lived qualities. It is also a mode of experiencing *place* and the *city*, and in this context is an aesthetic and insightful spatial practice. Through everyday walking we develop a sense of (and for) *place*. The everyday practices of walking vary in their purpose, pace and rhythm, and nurture more or less creative and more or less critical relationships to urban space. *Walkscapes* are rhythmic. Walking practices are constitutive of '*place-ballets*', as defined by David Seamon, choreographed wholes of multiple *place rhythms*. As such, they impact on the rhythmical continuums of urban places, influencing and suggesting their *tempo*.

Through a review of the literature and illustrated by fieldwork, this paper takes a phenomenological stance on walking. It starts by unravelling aspects and attributes of its character and continues by focusing on the *experience of walking* in the city and its relationship to *sense of place*. It explores walking both as purposeful activity and as creative and critical spatial practice. It distinguishes between three modes of walking: the purposive, the discursive and the conceptual. All three are inherent temporal practices of *place*. Lastly, the paper introduces walking as a temporal and rhythmical practice, part of a wider group of place-rhythms that characterise urban places.

The paper concludes by highlighting the implications for the urban design discipline. It explores walking as a temporal practice to be designed for, one that may induce creative and spatially critical responses to urban places, and one that needs closer attention when design is concerned with placemaking.

## Introduction

Walking is a *mode of experiencing place and the city*. It is a multifaceted activity and a temporal practice, which has an impact on design; as such urban walking has yet to be fully understood and engaged with.

As a 'lifeworld' (Seamon, 1980: 149) practice, walking is a unconscious way of moving through urban space, enabling us to sense our bodies and the features of the environment. With one foot-after-the other, we flow continuously and rhythmically while traversing urban place. Walking is an experience we are not conscious of, ignoring its potential as an aesthetic, creative or simply insightful practice. It is while walking that we sensorially and reflectively interact with the urban environment, firming up our relationship with urban places. Walking practices and *senses of (or for) place* are fundamentally related, the former affecting the latter and vice-versa. Furthermore, walking and *walkscapes* are rhythmical. While *walking* in the city, we perform in space-time, becoming immersed in temporal continuums of social everyday life activities fused with spatial and natural rhythmical events.

Walking is a practice of our everyday lifeworld, with four valuable and noteworthy facets. Firstly, it is an experience with singular attributes. Secondly, it is a significant mode of experiencing urban space that nurtures and moderates a sense of place. Thirdly, it is an aesthetic and 'critical spatial practice' (Careri, 2002; Rendell, 2006), a form of intervention affecting our relationship with urban places and a means through which these may be discovered and critically engaged with. Fourthly, it is a practice with temporal and rhythmical attributes, part of a wide entity composed of multiple patterns of practices and events.

This paper is divided into four sections. Through a literature review accompanied by field observations in the form of photographic work of various urban places, each of the four sections addresses one of the facets mentioned above.

The first section, *The walking experience*, studies walking from a phenomenological stance, unravelling its characteristic aspects and attributes. The second section, *Walking places*, focuses on walking as a *mode of experiencing*, a practice that induces senses of (or for) *place*. The third section, *Walking practices*, is propositional. It explores walking both as purposeful activity and as a creative and critical spatial practice. To do that, it conceptualises walking as a practice of at least three kinds – purposive, discursive and conceptual. In this section, walking is explored as a spatial practice to be designed for, and which may induce creative and spatially critical responses to urban places. The fourth section, *Walking rhythms*, introduces walking as a temporal practice, part of a wider group of temporal practices that characterise urban places.

By focusing on different facets of walking and exploring the experience of walking and its relationship to urban place, this article aims to contribute to urban design research discourse. It considers the particular value of walking and its relationship with *sense of place, placemaking and design* processes.

### *The walking experience*



Figs. 1 and 2. Everyday walking practices observed in Fitzroy

Square, London, Summer 2006.

*Walking* is an ordinary activity in our everyday life in the city. As a necessary practice, *walking* is almost instinctively performed in urban space (Figure 1, 2). It is an unquestioned form of movement through the city, often unnoticed, and not regarded in itself as being a particularly singular or insightful experience. Yet, it is through walking that we immerse ourselves and dwell in the representational and lived world.

Looking through the eyes of a phenomenologist, walking is an embodied practice that incorporates four noteworthy aspects.

First, and foremost, *walking* is not only a bodily movement but a behaviour of our *lifeworld* routine. *Lifeworld* is the ‘tacit context, tenor and pace of daily life to which normally people give no reflective attention’ including ‘both the routine and the unusual, the mundane and the surprising’ (Seamon, 2000: 6-7). Everyday walking belongs to a set of routines and thus forms part of the mundane in our everyday life.

Secondly, everyday walking is above all a *natural act*. Our attitude to it fits broadly into the *natural attitude* one has towards one’s daily routines. Giorgi (1970) defines *natural attitude* as ‘the unnoticed and unquestioned acceptance of the things and experiences of daily living’ (quoted by Seamon, 1980: 149). Like any other *lifeworld* activity, walking is commonly performed with an underlying *natural attitude*, an absence of conscious attention.

Thirdly, walking is a *habit* in our *lifeworld*. A *habit* is a recurring behaviour, which is nearly or completely performed in an involuntary and effortless way (Seamon, 1979: 38).

Fourthly, although it may be a *habit* and performed in an effortless way, walking involves a form of ‘purposive sensibility’, ‘an intentional bodily force which manifests itself automatically and yet also sensitively’ (Seamon, 1979: 40), adapting to changing contexts and aims or a task to be performed. This sensibility is a symptom of a *prereflective knowledge* one holds on walking (Seamon, 1979: 41). *Prereflective knowledge* is also an attribute of any habitual activity, to which David Seamon drawing upon the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) relates the notion of *body-subject* (1979: 40-43, 46-53). *Body-subject* is ‘the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviours of the person intelligently, and thus functions as a special kind of subject which expresses itself in a pre-conscious way. It is usually described by such words as ‘automatic’, ‘habitual’, ‘involuntary’ and ‘mechanical’ (Seamon, 1979: 41). Like other activities of our *lifeworld*, *walking* routinely unfolds over time and space as a result of this *pre-reflective knowledge*.

These attributes define walking as an act that is routinely performed, in this way making it indistinguishable from the wider world. From this perspective, the experience is one that is hard to grasp or even difficult to

acknowledge as such, unless we devote exclusive attention to it, take it out of the real world and reflect upon it conceptually. To reflect upon walking as a lived experience, we need to isolate it from context and reality, almost as if we could objectify it.

We find, however, that *everydayness* is only one of the facets of walking. The following section continues to develop the *experience of walking*, specifically in the urban condition, looking at its potential as an aesthetic and insightful act.

## *Walking places*



Figs. 3, 4 and 5. Urban-walking research practices at the 'Walking Arts and Performance Workshop' led by the artistic director Hilary Ramsden of the Walk & Squawk Performance Project<sup>1</sup>. Shadows of Hilary Ramsden and the author during the Walk 21-VI 'Everyday Walking Culture' International Conference, Zurich, Summer 2005.

*Through the act of walking new connections are made and re-made, physically and conceptually over time and through space. Public concerns and private fantasies, past events and future imaginings, are brought into the here and now, into a relationship that is both sequential and simultaneous. Walking is a way of at once discovering and transforming the city. (Rendell, 2006: 153)*

Walking, in spatial design disciplines, is most commonly referred to as a means of transportation, or a way of getting around. However, it is also an essential *mode of experiencing urban space*.

Walking is an *elemental way of perceiving urban places*. Whilst walking, one experiences and learns about places and develops feelings and thoughts for them. To walk is to experience, and as Yu-Fu Tuan explains 'to experience is to learn; it means acting on the given and creating out of the given. The given cannot be known by itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought' (1977: 9). Tuan reads *experience* as a compound of both *feelings* (registering subjective states) and *thought* (reporting on objective reality), the latter being two related ways of knowing (1977: 10; Rodaway, 1994: 5).

Walking is an active *mode of perceiving* the urban environment assisted by all the senses (Winkler, 2002: 8). In his study on the experience of passing environments, Justin Winkler introduces us to *walking* as a 'quite ancient condition of perception (and thinking)' that is in constant flow. '[It] is an activity that nurtures and assists fleeting perceptions and ever-recurring engagements, which forms the basis for 'an everyday aesthetics' (Winkler, 2002: 8). In other words, it constitutes mundane sensorial experiences. In this context, habitual walking induces sensori-value (aesthetic) judgments, which form the basis for a relationship with a particular urban environment or location.

The walking experience is multi-sensory. We compulsively engage using all our senses when walking in urban places. Beside the *aural*, the *olfactory*, the *visual*, and *touch*, even *taste* is occasionally referred to as contributing

<sup>1</sup> The Walk & Squawk Performance Project website: <<http://www.walksquawk.org>> (Accessed: 23.8.2007)

to the process of retaining a sense of place. 'The five senses constantly reinforce each other to provide the intricately ordered and emotion-charged world in which we live' (Tuan, 1977: 11).

Although enriching our apprehension of the world's spatial and geometric character (Tuan, 1977: 12), odour, smell and taste do not induce a sense of scale, depth and perspective or help to explain space as an external spacious whole inhabited by disparate objects (Tuan, 1977: 12). Together with physical movement, however, sight and touch are key to understand the organisation of space, structurally and geometrically. Tuan selects *sight*, *touch* and the *kinesthetic* experience as those that enable human beings to build-up a 'strong feeling for space and spatial qualities' (Tuan, 1977: 12). Along with corporeal movement, both sight and touch assist in our understanding of places as made out of objects, or in other words, of three-dimensional entities.

In contrast with other lifeworld activities, walking particularly affects the haptic sense. While moving through space one unavoidably *touches* and feels the environment with the entire body. *Touch* is not simply a 'pressure on the skin' but more generally the 'contact between the body and its environment' (Rodaway, 1994: 42). Touch is more than the action of the fingers feeling the texture of surfaces. Touch involves the whole body reaching out to the things constituting the environment and those things coming into contact with the body (Boring, 1942, quoted by Rodaway 1994: 44). Jan Gehl elaborates on the relationship between the walker and the walking environment in terms of preferred surfaces and floor materials, all based on *touch* (1987: 136-137).

Drawing extensively on the field of *the haptic*, Rodaway conceptualises four sorts of touch: global-touch, reach-touch, imagined-touch and extended-touch (1994: 48-54). All four aspects are exercised while walking through the city. The *reach-touch* and *global-touch* characterise and particularly enrich the experience of walking.

*Reach-touch* is the most common, exercised by the limbs, the feet and the hands; an exploratory activity that supports navigation through the environment (Rodaway, 1994: 50). It is an active form of touch, assisting our relationship to our body and the world by collecting information. It is a key to acquiring trust, a sense of belonging, coordination and knowledge (Rodaway, 1994: 51).

*Global-touch* 'represents the body's general contact with the environment' (Rodaway, 1994: 48). While traversing on foot through urban spaces the body is felt in contact with the environment, and through this process individuals refresh and reaffirm themselves as single parts of a wider social and spatial whole. The movement of the body across a socio-spatial environment changes our relationship to both other living bodies and objects in the space; it also enhances the sense of body and self. The notion of *global-touch* allows us to situate and passively feel our body in a particular setting without actually having to be touched or touch. It is about 'a general sense of presence given by the feeling of uprightness or basic body orientation, temperature, humidity and perhaps the relative crowding or space in its most general sense' (Rodaway, 1994: 49).

In sum, while walking, one is constantly in *touch* with a spatial environment, and in particular with the ground. A notion of *place* is acquired through the participatory attribute of *the haptic sense*. The reciprocal and body-bound exchange with the environment is essential for the emergence of a sense of belonging (Rodaway, 1994: 54).

*Motion* is also a basic attribute of our bodies a particular aspect of walking. Along with touch, it influences the perception and appropriation of environmental features, landscape appreciation and social participation (Winkler, 2002: 8). The experience of moving in the environment, known as *kinesthesia*, is particularly responsible for our sense of direction, geometry, perspective and scale (Tuan, 1977: 12). It assists our understanding of the human body, space and objects in relation to each other. We distinguish urban places as internal spatial wholes when traversing them.

In everyday life one does not perceive things from fixed points but instead ‘by walking around them’ (Ingold, 2004: 331). While walking around objects, we understand their depth, size, scale, and function. Hence, the act of walking is ‘a way of circumambulatory knowing’ (Ingold, 2004: 331). Everyday walking creates paths during which sensorial engagement and interaction with the environment take place – ‘perception paths’ (Gibson, 1979: 195-7, quoted by Ingold, 2004: 331).

Sensing and emotion are closely related (Rodaway, 1994: 5; Tuan, 1977). While walking in urban space the sensorial engagement with the environment involves in the intensification of sentiments, imagery and metaphors that we associate with places. It is simply by walking through places that we grow our attachment to them (see Lynch, 1960 & Banerjee et al., 1990).

A further aspect of walking is that by moving through space we learn and perform socially (Knox, 2005: 2). While walking we  *dwell* in places (Heidegger, 1962; see also Seamon et al., 1989), as part of temporal patterns of economic and social life, performed at different paces and rhythms, tracing our paths and intersecting other people’s life routines. Walking therefore helps to strengthen our social relationship to urban places as well as assisting our understanding of urban social space as a rhythmical structured entity. A sense of belonging and familiarity grows out of our habitual awareness and interaction with social timespace-routines of everyday urban places (Buttimer, 1976: 287; Seamon, 1979: 143-152; Lynch 1975; Jackson, 1994: 149-163).

In conclusion, perception through walking nurtures *senses of place*. Senses of place emerge and are sustained by bodily sensual and socially meaningful experiences originating from the perception of the environment whilst in motion. It is from this *perception-in-motion* that an ‘everyday aesthetics’ emerges (Winkler, 2002: 8; Määtänen, 2005). Through exercising *global* and *reach-touch*, we enhance our *haptic* relationship to place, and enrich this perception with multiple other sensual impressions. We also think about and interpret social reality while rhythmically intersecting social action and participating in recurring social practices in urban space. Sensual interaction and social impressions generated by the experience of walking nurture emotional judgement and thought for places. As a result, we (unconsciously) integrate these places into our urban *lifeworld*.

*Walking is a mode of experiencing* urban space that cannot be disassociated from (senses of) *place*. It is instead ‘constitutive of *place* itself’, a particular way of engaging with the world (Lee: 2004: 1). ‘Through walking [...] landscapes are woven into life, and lives are woven into the landscape, in a process that is continuous and never-ending’ (Tilley, 1994: 29-30, quoted by Ingold, 2004: 333).

### *Walking practices*

Walking is a practice of manifolds influencing our perception of the city. We seldom observe and reflect *upon* walking, or consider the impact and potential of distinct walking practices on the perception and relationship patterns we develop for urban places. More or less meaningful accounts of *place* depend from the way we practise of our walking.

Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city (Sinclair, 1997: 4, Basset, 2004; Careri, 2002). It is a way of simultaneously ‘discovering and creating’ (De Certeau, 1988: 115-122, quoted by Rendell, 2003: 231), yet also ‘discovering and transforming’ the city (Rendell, 2006: 153).

Apart from purposive and necessary *movement of one foot after the other*, walking is essentially ‘an informal and uncomplicated way for being present in the public environment’ (Gehl, 1987: 135). Yet, walking is also a practice from which one acquires an aesthetic (sensori-value) sense of urban environments and therefore an *aesthetic practice* (Careri, 2002). It can also be a performative act - in the sense of an artistic practice or a political form of engagement in urban place. In both cases, walking conveys an intended meaning and significance, and is different from an everyday involuntary walk. Walking as an artwork or with an artistic purpose turns into a *creative and critical spatial practice* (Rendell, 2006: 149).

Walking practices vary in pace, rhythm and purpose, and nurture more or less intimacy and more or less a critical relationship to place. What follows in the next paragraphs is propositional. Three different kinds of current and representative walking practice are distinguished. This conceptualisation is supported by the literature and informed by phenomenological fieldwork mostly comprising life observations, photographs and video recordings of various urban locations in London (from which samples are below).

Purposive, discursive and conceptual walking are noteworthy *walking practices* in the context of our everyday life.



Figs. 6 and 9. Purposive walking practices observed at Charing Cross Road, London, Winter 2005.

*Purposive walking* is a ‘necessary activity’ performed while aiming for a destination (Gehl, 1987: 135). It is a walking task. We refer to it as ‘walking to’ or ‘walking towards’. It connects A to B to C and further on, and is normally of a constant rhythmical and rapid pace. For this reason, purposive walking is performed in a rather anxious mode, in which we long for arrival at a destination (Figures 6-9).

Representations of *purposive walks* are pacing along with the crowd, rushing through, walking to work, walking home, and others. Whilst illustrating the rhythms of everyday urban life, Lefebvre writes about this kind of



walking: ‘people produce completely different noises when the cars stop: feet and words. From right to the left and back again. And on the pavements along the perpendicular street. At the green light, steps and words stop’, and he continues: ‘people [walk] back and forth, numerous and in silence’ (2004: 28). Within the group of *purposive walking*, particular practices can be identified that are characterised by bodily disengagement. Walking while listening to a walkman or ipod, walking while talking on the mobile phone, and walking while eating are just a few examples.

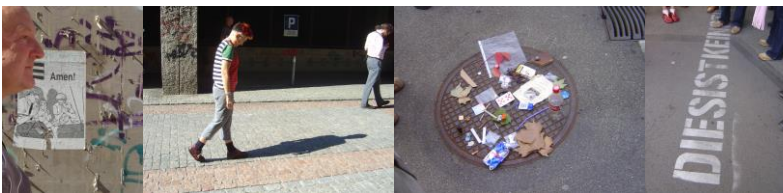


Fig. 10. Example of discursive walking practice, observed in New Oxford Street, London, Winter 2005.

*Discursive walking*, as opposed to *purposive walking*, is a spontaneous way of walking characterised by varying pace and rhythm. It is discursive because its pace and rhythm are synchronised with the walker’s own internal bodily rhythms (biological and psychological) whilst experiencing and swinging along with the places’ own moving rhythms, and being sensitive to external paces and temporalities in urban space (Figure 10).

It is a mode of walking where we consciously exercise the *global-touch*, being in complete awareness of the external environment and participating in it. Discursive walking is a participatory mode of walking, during which we half consciously explore the landscape while sensorially experiencing it passing by. In this way, our familiarity with the environment is deepened. In contrast to the previous walking practice, the journey is *more* important than the destination, as are the sites on route (Rendell, 2003: 231).

A *discursive walk* can be performed with no destination at all, the walking event in itself being the most important thing. Discursive walking is what Jane Rendell refers to as urban roaming (2003: 230). It is equivalent to the walking of the eighteenth century ‘*Man of the world or of the crowd*’, the literary *flâneur*, the *city stroller*, the spectator and the one who gazes at the landscape while experiencing its flow, featured in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe (1845), Charles Baudelaire (1995) and Walter Benjamin (1999) (Tester, 1994: 1-21). The name *discursive* is inspired by Michel De Certeau’s account of urban walking: ‘[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language’ (1988: 97).



Figs. 11, 12, 13 and 14. Examples of conceptual

walking practices at the ‘Walking Arts and Performance’ Workshop led by the artistic director Hilary Ramsden of the Walk & Squawk Performance Project<sup>2</sup> (11, 12), and at the ‘Mis-guided in Zurich – mind the Map’ Walkshop lead by the artist group Wrights & Sites<sup>3</sup> (13, 14), at the Walk 21-VI ‘Everyday Walking Culture’ International Conference, Zurich, Summer 2005.

Another practice of walking is *conceptual walking*. Unlike discursive walking, *conceptual walking* is a reflective mode. It is a creative response to our interpretation of place (Figures 11 and 12), or simply a way of gathering

<sup>2</sup> The Walk & Squawk Performance Project website: <<http://www.walksquawk.org>> (Accessed: 23.8.2007)

<sup>3</sup> The Wrights & Sites artists group website: <<http://www.mis-guide.com>> (Accessed: 23.8.2007)

information, or critically building awareness of urban environments (Figures 13 and 14). This form of walking inspires and influences creative responses to places; it is a process of becoming acquainted with a space or even a form of intervention in itself.

The journey is of less importance than the principal practice of walking itself, or other practices attached to it. Conceptual walking is choreographed in the sense that we think about it before we actually go about performing it.

Conceptual walking is a way of 'rethinking place as unfixed and site as performed' (Rendell, 2006: 149). It is used consciously as a way to get to know the city and uncovers features not usually noticed in our everyday life. Conceptual walks are for example the urban walks of the artist group Stalkers (Laboratory of Urban Interventions)<sup>4</sup>. Referring to these walks, Rendell writes that they 'heighten awareness by rendering places strange' (2006: 151; see also Careri 2002). Further examples of conceptual walking are the 'deambulations', the 'detours' and the 'derive' of the Surrealist and Situationists groups (Borden 2001; Basset, 2004; Andreotti & Costa, 1996; Ford 2005), the wanderings of land artists (i.e. Long, Robert Smithson, Oppenheim<sup>5</sup>), and the psychogeographical expeditions of literary writers (eg. Sinclair, 1997) and other art groups (eg. Platform<sup>6</sup>) (see Careri, 2002 and Rendell, 2006).

All three practices of walking influence embodied senses of place. *Purposive walking* is *habitual*, a recurrent activity that fosters a sense of order and continuity (Seamon, 1979: 119) in urban places. In contrast, *discursive and conceptual walking* promote *encounter* and *discovery* in urban places. As such, they are participative practices that help nurture places' socio-spatial milieus.

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<sup>4</sup> Stalker, Laboratory of Urban Art, artist group website, <<http://www.stalkerlab.it>> (Accessed: 28.8.2007)

<sup>5</sup> Tate Glossary [On-line]: Land Art, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=151>>, (Accessed: 20.8.2005)

<sup>6</sup> The Platform, artist group website <<http://www.platformlondon.org/aboutplatform.asp>>, (Accessed: 20.8.2005)

## ***Walking rhythms***

*Under the seeming disorder of the old city ... an intricate ballet in which individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. (Jane Jacobs, 1961: 65)*

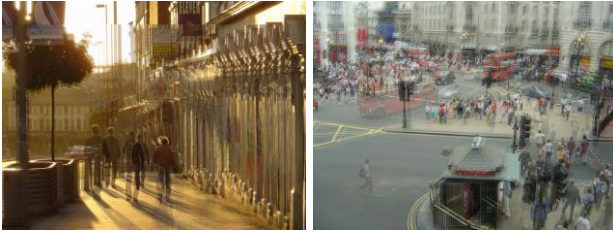
Walking as both an experienced and observed activity in urban space involves regularity and routine. It is performed rhythmically step after step, after step, after step, after step...

The rhythms closely relate to our internal biological and psychological rhythms (Solnit, 2001: 5), following a regular pace, in synchrony with our breathing, heartbeat and the degree to which we are relaxed, nervous, anxious, or determined.

The rhythm of walking is influenced by the interaction with other external rhythmical events that we come across in urban environments, such as other walking practices, or other bodily movements or activities that contrast in pace or rhythm. For example, while traversing a space where many people walk quickly, we tend to accelerate as a response. In contrast, in spaces where people walk slowly or engage with leisurely activities, such as stopping to chat or to observe children play games or entertaining events, our walking pace naturally tends to decrease. Behaviourists explain this tendency as an effect of a stimulus-response cognitive process, in which external stimuli influence our behaviour in space: the recurrence of particular kind of events (eg. other walking paces and practices) incites stimuli that encourage similar behavioural responses (Hilgard et al., 1974, 188-207, quoted in Seamon 1979: 39). In this context, the diverse character of walking environments in urban spaces - being social, calm or complex - impacts on how we practice walking in urban places.

*Walking* is inherently rhythmic, as it is a *place*. Urban places are more than just urban form (Avarot, 2002: 1); they consist of change, movement and social activity re-occurring over time and space (White, 1980; Zerubavel, 1981). Walking practices, with their pace and rhythm, together with the temporal character of places imposed by their place-rhythms, influence our perception of time, in terms of its experience and representation. While *walking* in the city, we experience everyday places through unidirectional time, a time that is 'repetitious, like the swing of the pendulum, ...calibrated to internal biological rhythms as well as to observable periodicities in nature' (Tuan, 1977: 129).

As observed in the previous section, walking in urban environments may be practised in a purposive, discursive or conceptual way, each comprising particular paces and rhythms. These walking practices are overlain in time and space and, together with other regularly patterned activities, generate polyrhythmical fields of interaction (Lefebvre, 2004: 16). These synchronised ensembles of distinct practices define the everyday spatio-temporal images of urban places and suggest a temporal rhythmical continuum, which in itself has a significant impact on the character of the place (Figures 15 and 16).



Figs. 15 and 16. Synchronised ensembles of distinct practices define the everyday spatio-temporal image of urban places; examples shown are from Leece Street, Liverpool (15) and Piccadilly Circus, London (16), Winter 2005.

In this context, *walking* is a temporal mode of interaction - a time-space rhythm – an integrated part (or ‘puzzle piece’) of complex multiple temporalities that unfold in urban space. Walking is part of a ‘multilayered dynamic complex’ of time-space rhythms laid out in one location (Buttimer, 1976: 287), and referred to here as *place-rhythms*.

*Place-rhythms* can be of social, spatial or natural character. They include functional routines of our *lifeworld* overlaid by ‘patterns of sound and smell, light and dark, heat and cold, movement and stillness’ that synchronise within the same time-space framework (Buttimer, 1976: 287) and define a place temporal milieu (Matos, 2004).



Fig. 17. Urban places are inherently rhythmical (Matos, 2004) – Fitzroy square (picture) has been subject to numerous field observations seeking to identify and decipher the various place-rhythms that define its temporal milieu, Summer 2005.

Walking is only one of the everyday life rhythms that Henri Lefebvre illustrates when describing his observations from a window in rue R. in Paris (2004: 27-37), one that intermingles and synchronises with various other rhythms in urban space. In particular, Lefebvre denotes *walking* as rhythm that specifically relates to both individuals and social groups. Conditioned by particular spatial and cultural settings, it integrates into a wider *rhythmical* whole composed of multiple time-space rhythms. For instance, on referring to tourists crowds, Lefebvre writes: ‘Many among these young people walk, walk, without a break, do the tour of the sights, of Beaubourg, of the Forum: ones sees them again and again, grouped or solitary; they walk indefatigably, chewing on gum or a sandwich. They only stop to stretch themselves out, no doubt exhausted, on the square itself, in the arcades of the Chiraqian Forum, or on the steps of the Fountain of the Innocent, which now serves only this purpose’ (2004: 29-30).

Seamon denotes *walking* as part of a wider *choreographed* whole, composed of synchronised patterns of human activity which he names ‘*place-ballet*’ (1979: 56-7; 1980: 157-9). *Place-ballet* is composed of both ‘*body-ballets*’ and ‘*time-space-routines*’. ‘*Body-ballet*’ is ‘a set of integrated gestures and movements which sustain a

particular task' during which movements flow rhythmically together and appear *automatic*. Seamon illustrates this with the example of operating an ice-cream truck (1979: 55). In contrast, '*time-space routines*', although including a set of habitual bodily movements and behaviours, extend further in time and space.

Individual '*body-ballets*' and individual '*time-space routines*' fuse in time and space into *place-ballets*. For Seamon, *place-ballets* are hubs of regular and synchronised patterns of human activity ('pre-reflective bodily patterns') (1979: 56-7). They are similarly described in Lefebvre's accounts of everyday life rhythms, and attributed to temporal continuity and the distinctiveness of urban places.

In sum, *walking* is essentially rhythmic and an activity that interacts with and is influenced by other space and bodily rhythms. It forms an integrated and supportive part of *place-rhythms* and contributes to the temporal continuity and distinctiveness of urban places.

## Designing for walking and urban places

*Walking is a way of understanding site in flux, in a manner that questions the logic of measuring, surveying and drawing from a series of fixed and static viewpoints.*

*Walking encounters sites in motion and in relationship to one another, suggesting that things seem different depending on from where we are coming and to where we are going. Rather than proceed from the observational, to the analytical, to the propositional, by intervening and moving through a site, walking proposes a design method where one can imagine beyond the present condition without freezing possibility into form. (Rendell, 2006: 151)*

While exploring the experience of walking and its relationship to urban place from different perspectives, a number of important issues surface. The following four points sum up the most important aspects on walking explored in the previous chapters.

Firstly, walking is an embodied practice of our everyday life which, although naturally performed, it involves a purposive sensibility and some sort of prereflective knowledge. It unconsciously adjusts to a particular context or task whilst being performed. Through the eyes of a phenomenologist, walking is a taken for granted activity, a lifeworld routine which blends in and is indistinguishable from the wider world. This *everydayness* of walking and its understanding as individual and purposive mode of movement between places often appears to dominate urban design practice when it comes to designing for walking. Frequently the aim is pursued to facilitate the ease of walking by providing spaces that are of sufficient size, free of obstacles, effortless to navigate, safe and following direct routes. It should be noted that this utilitarian approach may however fail to recognize other facets of walking, particularly those that contribute to the sensing of places.

Secondly, walking is a principal mode of perceiving and *living* (embodying) urban places, and in this sense an aesthetic and insightful act. While walking, we sense and develop a sense of place. By moving about in urban space, we strengthen our relationship with it and learn that social space is a rhythmically structured whole, made of synchronised time-space everyday life routines. Sensory impressions and social interactions derived from our everyday walking practices nurture a sense of belonging, familiarity, emotional attachment and thoughts for particular urban locations.

Thirdly, walking practices are at least of three distinct kinds: purposive, discursive and conceptual. Walking is not simply a means to traverse urban space but also a way of becoming acquainted and a form of intervention in urban space. Depending on how it is performed, walking may inspire and influence creative responses to places. In this sense, walking is a way of discovering, creating and or transforming the city. It can be an aesthetic and creative practice as much as a critical and spatial one.

Fourthly, walking is inherently rhythmical. Its tempo and rhythmic pattern is influenced by internal bodily rhythms as well as external place-rhythms that determine the perceived slow or fast character of places.

The above walking practices support and integrate urban place-ballets, defined by choreographed bundles of bodily performances and time-space routines. In other words, and replacing the dance analogy by a musical one,

walking practices are place-rhythms, part of the polyrhythmical (or *symphonic*) fields of orchestrated everyday social practices (Lefebvre, 2004: 16, 31) that fuse with spatial and natural events which unfold rhythmically over time and in the same location. As such, walking practices synchronise with other place-rhythms, suggesting and representing *tempo* and defining rhythmical continuums of life activity that impacts on a place's temporal identity and character.

The following section aims to contextualise walking within the field of urban design. Opening the field for further studies regarding application in the urban design field, both in theory and in practice, the four facets of walking explored in this paper - the *walking experience*, *walking and the experience of places*, *walking practices*, and *walking and place rhythms*, illustrated walking in terms of experience, tempo and rhythm, and its relationship to sense of place. They demonstrate that beyond the more common parameters typically addressed by design – location, directness, the efficiency and safety of routes and so on – there is scope and the need for qualitative descriptions of walking which inform and inspire design interventions that favour the experience of walking in the city and enrich notions of sense of place and placemaking.

How should walking be then regarded in the field of urban design? The above identified issues and practices should be considered in order to better integrate walking into urban design practices, particularly when we seek to enhance the everyday experience of walking in the city and spaces.

More than just designing to facilitate purposive walking practices, we need to design for the experience of walking in order to foster discursive and conceptual practices in urban places. How may design promote and enhance the experience of walking and with it that of a place? Here are some ideas: design for the senses, particularly the haptic sense, stimulating and enhancing its performance; design for different kinaesthetic experiences, by facilitating purposeful bodily movements in urban place and using design to accommodate or stimulate slower or varying walking paces and rhythm, in this way enrich the experience of place whilst promoting spatial encounters and creative and critical engagement with spaces. In this context, design needs to be informed and guided by a clear understanding of how walking behaviours may be influenced and encouraged (a theme falling outside the scope of this article). Aesthetic and creative walking practices can and should be enhanced by design, with proposals that raise people's level of engagement, encounter and enjoyment in urban space. Design should also promote and cater for critical (walking) manifestations in urban space.

Furthermore, design for a particular character or sense of place may be informed by an understanding of the experiential dimension of walking in urban space. The different practices of walking offer experiential accounts, interpretations of relationships between everyday social, spatial and natural constellations of rhythms of place, as permitted and detected by the senses. In this way, the sensing of place through walking can inform and support a design process that responds sensitively to urban spaces and their temporal attributes.

Because urban designers need to acquire a thorough understanding of the socio-spatial characteristics of the place they are working in, *conceptually* walking these places may prove a useful practice to gain a better understanding of it. In this context, we need to understand and explore walking as a design method in its own right that can inform the theory and practice of place-design.

Finally, designing for walking and the sense of place requires an understanding of *place-ballets*. Place-ballets foster attraction, diversity, comfortableness and distinctiveness (Seamon, 1979: 143-152), and thus invite and promote walking in urban places. An analysis of urban space should include experiential maps of its inherent place-ballet and constitutive walking practices; these will offer the urban designer valuable insights on localised senses of place to which he may respond to by design.

To conclude, walking calls for a *sensorial urban design* that encourages sensorial and social encounters and as a result promotes and enhances the sense of (and for) place. Both purposive walking and the walking experience in urban environments needs in depth analysis and to be designed for in a more holistic manner; and walking needs to be accepted and explored as a significant and alternative design method in the practice of urban and place design.



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