

WHEN WALKING, TIME STANDS STILL WHILE SPACE FLIES

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Authors note: Walking an urban transect translates a geographical line through the city into a sequence of situations. I walked through some of the world's largest urban agglomerations capturing moments and situations of everyday life. Each of these passages brought me in three to five days from one end to the other. This text is also a passage through thoughts and pictures revolving around these walks and especially the one, when I *crossed São Paulo* in November 2011.

"If there is one thing that has disappeared it is the notion of a flow of time that moves forward inevitably and irreversibly and that can be predicted by more astute and more perceptive thinkers."¹

The practice of urban planning professionals includes analysis and assessment of formal maps and comparable geographical representations from above. If an aerial view or a street plan visualizes the city as an

¹ Bruno Latour in his acceptance speech at the award of the Cultural Prize by the Munich University Society on 8 February 2010.

abstract place, the experiences of its residents and visitors instead are understood as anthropological places similar to Kevin Lynch's elements of the city (Lynch 1960) or Bernardo Secchi's archipelago and connections (Valva 2012). Physical presence in the analysis and photographic documentation played an important role in the works of Jane Jacobs in her seminal work on the life in American streets (Jacobs 1961) or Kevin Lynch who utilized interviews to gather empirical data that led to his concept of mental maps and the imageability of cities (Lynch 1960).

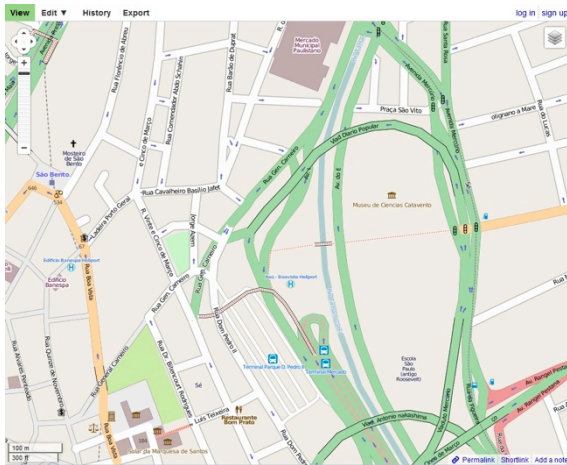


Figure 1. Terminal Parque Dom Pedro II in São Paulo. Map view from Open Street Map.



Figure 2. Terminal Parque Dom Pedro II in São Paulo. Photographs of the area.

The city changes and evolves in its shapes and forms, practices and meaning continuously. What has been built will be used. It will be ruined, transformed and new meanings will be given to voids while places lose what they have been symbolizing for so long.

Planning likes to tell the story of spatial transformations by means of the fixed points of urban planning concepts, master plans, and neighborhood designs. Planning for the real would mean to mentally straighten out the chaos at things and arrange them as a temporary stable composition while acknowledging the fact that this composition will disintegrate again in a subsequent entropic process (Smithson 1967). Ambiguity and openness evolve from the gradual loss of what were initially clear categories. The urban space is the palimpsest (Corboz 1983) that is constantly being rewritten as the temporal synchronism of historical traces.

The signs no longer fit into an image. They become shattered symbols of past meanings. This confusing heap of disjointed symbols is the starting

point for a new creation, self-determined by a variety of user groups, of significance in the social space through the merger of these aspects to create new links and distinctions. This is nothing more than territorialisation and assimilation and therefore the accepting of responsibility for these parts of the city.



Figure 3. Avenida Paulista, 2011

"The Urban Revolution" (Lefebvre 1970) and the anticipated generalization of capitalist urbanization processes through the establishment of a planetary fabric or web of urbanized spaces is no longer the artist's speculation only. Urbanization has now "come to condition all major aspects of planetary social existence and ... the fate of human social life", as Neil Brenner and Roger Keil state in their discussion of the last decades of urban research and theory of the global cities (Brenner 2011). This contemporary urban world reveals new forms of global connectivity, new patterns of disconnection, peripheralization, exclusion and vulnerability. Neo-Marxist researchers like Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Manuel Castells explored these worlds as subject to supranational or global forces and unleashed an abundance of new methods and discourses to observe the flux of urbanization as "an active moment within the ongoing production and transformation of capitalist sociospatial configurations" (Brenner 2011:602). The global city concept (Sassen 1991; Taylor 2004) focused on studies of

the role of major cities as global financial centers along three trajectories: the formation of a global urban hierarchy, the contested restructuring of urban space, and the transformation of the urban social fabric thus developing to “a fundamentally disjointed, yet profoundly authoritarian, new world order” that might well lead to new “possibilities for radical or progressive social change” (Brenner 2011:607).

The search for fantasies about cities – of wonder, speed, diversity, density, verticality, innovation – developed in the context of observations about certain European and American cities have been shifted to the “disconnected” and “alien” metropolis of the South, as Koolhaas states in an interview talking about Lagos. They have persisted through the last urbanizing century, from Simmel through Park and Wirth, to enliven contemporary analyses of the social life, cultural politics and economic dynamism of cities. More importantly, they have profoundly colored what we are able to think of as a city, what is admitted as city-ness (Robinson 2004:570).



Figure 4. Coming down a hill... Pirituba/
São Paulo, 2011



Figure 5. Coming down a hill... near
Maslak/Istanbul, 2013

“Human beings relate to their environment in the tasks of making a living”

(Ingold 2000). The moves and actions to "make a living" of billions of people produces spaces every day anew by marking territories around places where one feels "at home". Territorialisation is understood as "the creation of meaning in social space through the forging of coded connections and distinctions" (Brown and Lunt 2002:17) into some form of uniformity or consistency, such as laws, symbols, slogans or concepts. Processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation go back on ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze 1987) and what they call striated and smooth spaces and connected processes to it. The smooth spaces are the infinite, open, unlimited spaces contrary to the striated spaces which are understood as fixed and limited. So the smooth spaces are not fixed by meaning, by social and political claims, they are the pure potential of possibilities. Like a blank canvas to paint on.

Smooth space constantly transverses into striated space and this again reverses into smooth space. Striated space can always become smooth space again. Territorialised spaces are the striated space. Limited in its possibilities, but effective within these restrains. However, individuals and groups may decide under the impression of a crisis, total upheaval or subtle changes to leave a territorial assemblage, shedding the system by which they had been previously controlled. This process of de-territorializing is the destabilization and ultimate removal of codes that confer fixed meanings. An open, unlimited, virtual place appears - the smooth space. Or as Marc Augé puts it, non-places without memories about the place evolve (Augé 1995). In extreme this means the anarchic city. The Deleuzoguattarian focus on change instead of the outcome of change is the concept of becoming.

The urban fabric consists of both space qualities at the same time. The continuous alteration of the qualities of space and the ability to transverses between the smooth and striated space. The city and all space only exist because of the described bias.



Figure 6. Picture grid between smooth and striated, being at home and making a living, all from São Paulo

Social science has been accompanied by photography for the last century, but never really embraced the photograph as observations of its own right. Pierre Bourdieu who studied the transitional society of the Berber in Algeria around 1950 used photography extensively to document his fieldwork and to capture details that even the most observant researcher would have missed. In 1935 the U.S. Farm Security Administration for the first time employed a separate team of photographers in a large-scale social-scientific study to demonstrate the impact of the New Deal visibly and to assist the social scientists with their research.

Systematically composed photographs of farmhouse rooms that were analyzed by the Farm Security Administration served as a template for compiling and comparing lists of household object inventories. Information in images is interpreted in an entirely different manner than written material and some details (e.g. composition, color references) can only be inadequately reproduced, if at all, separate from the original photo document.

Few anthropological studies use photography and writing as complementary forms of presentation – as exemplified in “Let us now praise famous men” (1960) - instead of preferring one method to the other. This book by

journalist James Agee highlights the lives of three farmer families in the United States in 1941 along with an equally important but uncommented contribution by photographer Walker Evans. "Through Navajo Eyes: An exploration in film communication and anthropology" (1972), the film and book project of painter, photographer and film-maker Sol Worth and anthropologist John Adair transcended the textual level for the first time. In studies and adaptations of several films that were produced by the Navajo for the project, the film producers explore and present their surroundings through their own eyes. For Sol Worth film and photography was a form of language, comparable to writing and yet entirely different.



Figure 7a. São Paulo (slideshow)



Figure 7b. São Paulo (continued slideshow)

"The city is three-dimensional. The pedestrian or cyclist interacts physically with the uneven topography of the city. The tactile experience, which is the most profound knowledge of the city implies multi-modal bodily involvement and physical condition." (Sasaki 1997:68).

Since walking became a choice rather than a necessity or nuisance, the act of walking became an established perceptual instrument to understand, analyze and criticize the city. The romantic walker traversed the environment in an elevated state of mind to be fully immersed into an aesthetic phenomena whileas the 'flâneur' as described by Baudelaire walked to experience the city from a detached and critical perspective. Concepts of walking inspired artistic projects of the Situationist International in the 1960's (Careri 2005), the role of the flaneur in literature in Walter Benjamin's "Arcades Project" (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999), and architecture in Secchi's "urbanism on foot" (Paquot 1999; Valva 2012). Most of these concepts evoke and grasp the dynamic, fragmentary, ephemeral city and can also be found in anthropological theories about the language and memory of places (Augé 1995; Certeau 1984) , place-making (Pink 2008) or training methods for academic researchers and architects (Masschelein 2010).

In his text "E-ducing the gaze" (2010) Masschelein asks for a poor pedagogy and lays out the principles of his teachings for students and scholars to become aware and knowing in post-conflict cities. Based on his teaching practice, his reflections on Walter Benjamin present walking as a poor methodology that suspends judgment and allows a look that can transform the observer, to expose the scholar to the environment he wants to observe. A precondition to take in a critical perspective or a view "beyond every perspective" (Masschelein 2010:46).

Benjamin is referring to a difference in the activity itself, a difference between walking and flying, copying and reading, as different ways of relating to the world, relating to the present, to what is present. This difference is a difference in power, in the effect of that activity on ourselves and on what is revealed. The one who flies, Benjamin says, only 'sees,' but the one who walks the road 'learns of the power it commands' (erfährt von ihrer Herrschaft) (Masschelein 2010:46).

Similar to the principal claim of the *dérive* or drifting by the International

Situationists (Debord 1996) also Masschelein denies that walking has an aim. Walking without aim, even without a proper reason, he explains, is the key to become attentive rather than becoming aware. Walking the road brings the walker into a mental state of mind that exhausts judgment and classification by "copying the city" with his feet in his long-term movement exposed to what he sees. "It is a state of mind which opens up to the world in such a way that the world can present itself to me (that I can 'come' to see) and I can be transformed." (Masschelein 2010:45).

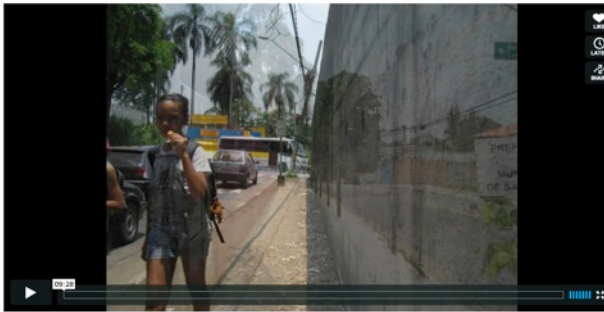


Figure 8. Urban Transect São Paulo (stop-animation). Available at: <http://vimeo.com/36091849>



Figura 9. Urban Transect London (stop-animation). Available at: <http://vimeo.com/40185892>

"Reality is so abundant that one simply needs to reach out and extract something in a simplified and interpretive manner", said Henry Cartier-Bresson, and the difficulty is to choose the right object. Hans-Ulrich Obrist said once about photographer Thomas Struth that it is fascinating to see the images he finds.

Finding images in such abundance – every situation is full of possible pictures and every photographer has a unique ability to identify certain images in it; to see images that others do not see and to capture them in photographs – is the skill that sets him or her apart from others.

The better the photographer the more characteristic is his or her "perceptive eye" that becomes

the unique trademark reflected in his or her works.

In an extreme scenario the images of a photographer represent the reality of a given situation which only he or she can produce. In "The Nature of Photographs" (1998) Stephen Shore explains the selection process in photography. To complement his ideas I want to present Vilém Flusser's

media - philosophical views on the subject. Stephen Shore (US photographer, *1947) based his theory of photography on a distinction between painting and photography. The painter composes a picture, while the photographer selects one. Every situation is an endless pool of unrealized photographs. By choosing the camera settings and the angle one of these images is realized. In the context of analyzing photographic documents Shore distinguishes four aspects: the physical (type of paper, format and size), image related (framing, depth, time, focus), mental (subject, visual symbols, classification) and the imaginative aspect. The most important factors in terms of selection relate to image are aspects such as framing, the relevance of image borders, lighting, exposure and the time when the picture is taken, focus and depth depicted in the image. For the image content the imaginative aspect is important as it allows one to "enter the picture" when observing it. Shore refers to it as "letting the eyes wander" through the content depicted on the image. The longer this process lasts the more profound the "mental depth" becomes.

Mental depth was one of the selection criteria for the photographs included in this volume. Media theorist Vilém Flusser argues in a similar way in his essay "Photography as a general attitude toward life" (Flusser 1989) and explains how images are produced. Like Shore Flusser regards the camera as an infinite mass of images, much like the photographer and also the photons which ultimately render the image visible on any chosen medium. Together these three components represents a possibility realized. The image is the result of coordinating all three components.

Images are not produced but result out of a specific interaction between the photographer, the camera and the photons. The "photographic program" produces an image in which the photographer experiences himself or herself. As a result of this realized opportunity the number of images that he or she is able to produce changes.



Figure 10. Finding a path through São Paulo

By walking through “under the command of the road” (Masschelein 2010) and experience oneself through taking photographs as Flusser explains, the photographing walker becomes attuned to the specific-ness of encountered urban spaces. It means an emphatic exploration of the fragmented and shifting territorialities and temporalities “where people are at home” in the flux of urbanisation.

“Every move . . . is an untimely moment redistributing what has gone before while opening up what may yet come” (Deleuze 1987).

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