



Symposium
**WALKING
PLACES**

Conference Proceedings

10 - 11 January 2019

CIUL - Centro de Informação de Lisboa

COORD.

ANITA STRASSER

CARLA DUARTE

dinamia
'cet _iscte

FCT Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

CUCR
centre for urban and community research

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**Scientific Commission**

Paula André (DINÂMIA'CET-IUL/ISCTE-IUL)

Technical Support

Bruno Vasconcelos

Mariana Leite Braga

Published by

DINÂMIA'CET-IUL

February 2021

ISBN

978-989-781-309-2

Cover Image

Carla Duarte

Design and Layout

Bruno Vasconcelos

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial	I
Carla Duarte and Anita Strasser	
Walking, Cadence and Urban Rhythms	1
Alex Rhys-Taylor	
The Stone Sea: a walk through mountain research	7
Anita Strasser	
Walking in Valverde	24
Carla Duarte Paula André	
Flâneuse Fragments: Towards a critical and situated feminist approach to walking in the city	32
Emma Jackson	
Walking as an artistic practice	40
Luísa Salvador	
Community Policing in Lisbon – Walking for safer neighbourhoods	47
Mónica Diniz	
Shaping starts with Walking	53
Sérgio Barreiros Proença	

Flâneuse Fragments: Towards a critical and situated feminist approach to walking in the city

Emma Jackson

Centre for Urban and Community Research Sociology Department Goldsmiths College, University of London

email: E.Jackson@gold.ac.uk

tags

flâneuse, flâneuserie, walking, cities, gender, race, urban

Abstract

This paper sets out an alternative agenda for thinking and writing about walking in the city from a situated and feminist perspective. Taking a different departure point from traditions of writing about walking in the city that celebrate the figure of the flâneur, this intervention proposes a mode of flâneuserie that can be used as a critical feminist practice to interpret and disrupt urban space. The paper draws on a set of *flâneuse fragments* – ideas borrowed from a range of women activists, academics and artists – who use walking in their research and practice. The paper firstly outlines feminist discussions about the possibility of the flâneuse, drawing on other readings of the early modern city. I then lay out a series of propositions for a situated and critical flâneuserie using examples of feminist approaches ranging from the UK-based sociologist Nirmal Puwar to the Blank Noise collective in India. The paper proposes a mode of flâneuserie that a) is attuned to how different forms of power unfold in and through public space b) uses attunement to power as the basis for interventions that challenge the status quo c) uses walking to read the past, present and futures of spaces, against the grain d) recognises that experiences of walking are situated and embodied rather than universal e) is multiple and based on a collective effort f) provides insights into the urban without claiming to be complete or universal.

Introduction

Classical theories of the urban experience from the late nineteenth and early/mid twentieth century that have become ‘the canon’ are largely based on the experiences of men. For example, while the accounts of Simmel and his idea of the urban blasé (1903) or Goffman’s idea of civil inattention (1963), which capture how those moving through the city are politely disinterested in their fellow passers-by, may seem readily applicable to anyone travelling on the London tube at rush hour, they start to breakdown when we think about incidents of sexual harassment on public transport. Who is afforded anonymity and invisibility in the city as they move through it? How do different experiences of walking in the city provide a lens on how power works through urban space? These questions should be key to thinking about accounts of walking in the city.

The argument this paper proposes is that firstly, the dominant account of walking in the city in urban studies presupposes a white able-bodied man, as exemplified in the figure of the flâneur – this is not a new or original argument but is worth restating. Secondly, I set out six propositions for a critical and situated flâneuserie, as opposed to flânerie. My contention is that while the flâneur has acted as an inspiration for a tradition of walking that takes for granted a set of privileges based on gender, race and able-bodiedness, feminist walking practices can offer valuable insights into how power works through urban space, challenge and disrupt taken for granted assumptions about the body of the

walker, and offer alternate readings of the city. The paper draws on a set of *flâneuse fragments* – ideas borrowed from a range of women activists, academics and artists – who use walking in their research and practice in order to advance a critical and situated feminist approach to walking in the city.

Finding the Flâneuse

The flâneur is a surprisingly resilient urban archetype arising from nineteenth-century Paris. The flâneur is an idler and voyeur celebrated in the writings of Baudelaire (1969) and others. He is a wry and detached observer of urban life who moves through the city with ease. Most notably Walter Benjamin (1999) further develops the idea of the flâneur in his unfinished/unfinishable magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, an inventory of the Paris of the nineteenth century that provides a fractured lens on the city of modernity. The flâneur moves through the streets of Paris, in Benjamin's words 'botanising on the asphalt' (Benjamin (1999: 36). That is to say, just as the naturalist reads and classifies the natural world, so the flâneur reads and classifies the city. The book is arranged in thematic sections and does not lend itself to being read from front to back cover. Rather the reader is invited to get lost and read through the text, in the same way that the flâneur understands the city through its fragments.

The flâneur in these classical accounts is most definitely a man: after all in the Paris of the nineteenth century or in the city of the early twentieth century only certain bodies had the privilege to, in Baudelaire's words: 'be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world' (1969: 4). And he is most definitely white. However, the

particular raced and gendered experience that the figure of flâneur embodies and the difficulties for other people to take on that role has not gone unnoticed or unchallenged.

Janet Wolff (1985) argues that the flâneur describes the experiences of 'the men of modernity'. Women are present in these accounts but only as the object of the flâneur's gaze, they cannot be the flâneur. She argues 'There can be no possibility of the flâneuse: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century.' (1985: 45).

But does this necessarily mean that there cannot be a flâneuse? Elizabeth Wilson (1991) engages with women's accounts of walking in the city of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in order to argue against Wolff, stressing that urban space was and is more shifting and contradictory. She argues that it presented dangers but also opportunities for women, drawing on historical sources to argue that working-class women working in the city were paid more than in rural areas. Wilson excavates the histories of middle-class artistic women who walked in the city, for example, George Sands, while also highlighting that the accounts of middle-class men are *full* of working-class women in public. They were there but did not occupy space on the same terms as men. Furthermore, Wilson argues that the urban had impacts on masculinity as well as femininity, painting a picture of the insecure and impotent flâneur – and let's not forget *The Arcades Project* is looking back at the flâneur as a figure at risk of extinction due to the tumultuous character of modernity. Wilson's account thus makes central the experiences of women in the cities of modernity and destabilises the figure of the flâneur.

The restrictions experienced by black women in particular in the early twentieth century in urban space are explored by Hazel Carby (1992). Carby

focuses on moral panics about the presence of black women in cities that emerged during the period of mass migration of black people from the American south to the northern cities, highlighting the policing of black women's bodies by both white and black middle-class intellectuals and arbiters of morality. She outlines how the possibility of black women's presence in the streets became coded as a threat to the moral order:

'If a black woman can claim her freedom and migrate to an urban environment, *what is to keep her from negotiating her own path through its streets?* What are the consequences of the female self-determination evident in such a journey for the establishment of a socially acceptable moral order that defines the boundaries of respectable sexual relations?' (1992: 746, emphasis added)

Carby uses biography to illustrate how black women at this time challenged these gendered and racialised norms, for example, pointing to the urban blues women whose mobile lives and forms of self-expression in their music flew in the face of received ideas of respectability.

The tension between the stark policing of North American cities along gendered, classed and raced lines and the desire to lose oneself in the city is captured in the novellas of Nella Larsen. Larsen's protagonists are always on the move – from the South to the North, across oceans to Europe and back again, and also within the city. There is a passage in *Quicksand* where Larsen's protagonist, Helga, who like the author is a black mixed-race woman, finds freedom on the streets of Chicago:

'[A]s she stepped out into the moving multi-colored crowd, there came to her a queer feeling of enthusiasm, as if she were tasting some agreeable exotic food, sweetbreads – smothered with truffles and mushrooms –

perhaps. And, oddly enough, she felt, too, that she had come home.' (2014 [1928]: 30)

Here, for a moment, Helga who never feels like she quite belongs anywhere, can revel in being part of the crowd.

So far, my critique of the way the figure of the flâneur has become the archetypal walker has drawn on other readings of the early modern city based on the biographies and writings of women to highlight the raced and gendered privileges that underscore accounts of walking in the city that have become the canon. They reveal that experiences of walking are situated and embodied rather than universal and that constrictions on walking offer insights into how power works through urban landscapes.

While Benjamin wrote about the flâneur as almost an endangered species, he has proved to be a durable figure in influencing writing on walking. There is still no shortage of contemporary books and articles in the genre of psychogeography by lone male white walkers exploring the city's edges and ruins. In London, this mode of writing is very dominant in writing on the city and is epitomized in the work of Iain Sinclair (2002; 2003; 2015) and Will Self (2007). The kind of arguments found in the dialogue between Wolff and Wilson continue to have purchase on contemporary debates about walking in the city.

Wilson's arguments have more recently been advanced by Lauren Elkin (2016), who argues that 'To suggest that there couldn't be a female version of the flâneur is to limit the ways women have interacted with the city to the ways men have interacted with the city.' (2016: 11). Like Wilson, Elkin carves out an alternative history of flâneuserie based on literary figures such as Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf, but also drawing from her own experiences as a contemporary flâneuse.

It is a highly readable and enjoyable book that has taken debates about walking, gender and the city to a new audience – and the introduction brilliantly skewers the psychogeography genre – but has its limitations in that it doesn't fully attend to differences of class and race among women. Elsewhere, the geographers Mott and Roberts (2014) have critiqued new writing on urban exploration, its masculism and its ignoring of how gender is embodied in the figure of the urban explorer. They argue that extreme forms of urban exploration require and celebrate a particular kind of body – pithily noting, 'not everyone has (the) balls' (2014) for this kind of research.

How then, might we carve out an alternative form of flâneuserie that is attentive to the situated and embodied experiences of the walker? How might reading against the grain of the city of modernity be something we can extend into the present through our walking practices? And how might this be a tool for critical urban enquiry? In the next section I explore the work of various contemporary walkers in order to put forward six propositions for flâneuserie as a critical urban method.

Propositions for a multiple, critical and situated approach to walking in the city

My first proposition is for a flâneuserie that *uses walking to read the past, present and futures of spaces, against the grain*. Here I am taking inspiration from my colleague from Goldsmiths Sociology, the Coventry-based flâneuse Nirmal Puwar. She is perhaps best known for her book *Space Invaders* (2004) but here I'm drawing on a paper called *The Architecture of parliament: Flâneur as a method in Westminster* (2010) where Puwar uses walking through parliament and archival research to read this highly masculine space against the grain and to uncover a

submerged history of women's activism. Puwar explores how hierarchies are written into the fabric of buildings and sustained – and subverted – by the performance of those who participate in these spaces. Through writing the history of the suffragette movement into the spaces of parliament, she argues:

'Inhabitation of space enables bodies to move in planned and co-ordinated ways but also in unpredictable ways. Boundaries etched in architectures of stone and iron grids do not go unchallenged. Even the cosiest and most constrained of public men's dwellings can be shaken. Unheard political bodies can take root in the most coveted of polite society's digs.' (2010: 299)

We find another flâneuse reading monumental buildings against the grain in Agnès Varda, the French director who made films from 1955 until her death in 2019. This is a recurring theme in her work, but here I am focussed on the short film *The So-called Caryatids* (Les Dites Cariatides) (1984). The short film, made for French television, combines the poetry of Baudelaire with her own reflections. It is a Walter Benjaminesque inventory/meditation with a feminist twist; as the camera moves around the city Varda muses on the apparent ease with which the female statues support buildings on their heads, as opposed to the grimacing male Atlases who flaunt their labour for all to see.

The writer Eloise Ross reflects on Varda's use of these feminine sculptures, arguing: 'Varda makes it clear that the caryatids are part of an historical pattern that erases women's contributions to society, and their humanity.' (2019, no page number). This playful visual reinterpretation asks the viewer to look again as they move through the city.

My second and third propositions are for a

flâneuserie that is *attuned to how different forms of power unfold in and through public space and to how experiences of walking are situated and embodied rather than universal*. I have already argued that alternative readings of the city of modernity, that centre the experience of women, highlight the forms of class, race and gender privilege that the flâneur embodies. Further contemporary inspiration comes from Carole Wright, who in her piece 'Walking whilst being Blak Outside' (2020) takes us on a journey through the gentrifying landscape of South London in lockdown. Carole Wright's walk makes visible processes of the classed reordering of London, while also reflecting on the tension on the practice of walking and the threat of racial hostility. She points to the displacement of the working-class people through estate redevelopment, outcrops of luxury flats, and the developers' promises written on advertising hoardings. Sitting at the top of the hill in Burgess Park, Wright is joined by voices:

'It's the spirit of my ancestors, grandparents Wilhelmina and Eric Wright, my Jamaican lineage. They lived in Camberwell on the Elmington Estate, in a slab-like tower block built in the 1950s. They moved there in the '60s. That's gone. So here we stand, my past, present and future. 'Come let's walk Nana and Grandad' (2020: 32)

Later on her walk, Wright is joined by the voices of young men, Rolan Adams, Rohit Duggal, Stephen Lawrence, Trayvon Martin and Ahmaud Arbery. All young men who were killed in racist murders, the first three are South Londoners killed between 1991-93 and the last two are African Americans who were racially murdered in 2012 and 2020. Wright reflects on how Ahmaud was killed while jogging in the countryside 'another reason to kill Black men is added to the list: exercising in nature.' (2020: 34). She continues: 'Whenever I've walked solo or in a group of Black people in the English

countryside, Kent or elsewhere, I've been made to feel unwelcome.' (ibid).

This tension between the urge to walk and the threat of racial harassment/violence is also at the heart of Garnette Cadogan's essay *Black and Blue* (2019). Reflecting on his formative experiences of walking in Kingston, Jamaica and comparing this to the constant scrutiny he is under as a black man walking New Orleans and New York City, he concludes:

'Walking while black restricts the experience of walking, renders inaccessible the classic Romantic experience of walking alone. It forces me to be in constant relationship with others, unable to join the New York flâneurs I had read about and hoped to join.' (2019: 142).

Carole Wright's walk highlights how classed and racial forms of power unfold through urban space in ways that are intimately entangled with the body and biography of the walker.

My next proposition is for a flâneuserie that is *multiple and based on a collective effort*. The flâneur walks solo but what about collective walking as a way to know the city? Here I am taking inspiration from Morag Rose, geographer and founder of the Loiterers Resistance Movement (LRM) in Manchester. Speaking at a British Sociological Association Cities event in 2018, the self-defined anarcho-flâneuse described the limitations of the figure of the flâneur: 'If anyone had told me as a queer crip woman from a council estate about the flâneur, I would've thought I couldn't do it.' Rose's PhD was based on conducting walking interviews with women in Manchester, taking an inclusive approach to walking – including wheels, sticks and mobility aids. She also, through the LRM, puts on a monthly *dérive* [a Situationist walking technique] in Manchester as a way to playfully explore the changing city and to 'reclaim it for revolutionary

fun'. This is an inclusive approach to walking that also makes urban exploration a collective endeavour.

Building on the theme of collective endeavour, my final example comes from the Blank Noise collective who stage interventions all over India and beyond to challenge male domination in public space. They illustrate my fifth proposition, for a *flâneuserie* that *can use attunement to power as the basis for interventions that challenge the status quo*. Blank Noise first started life as an MA thesis project by Jasmeen Patheja on women's experiences of public space and has evolved into 'a critical node within broader youth-led online activism in India (Mitra-Khan, 2012: 114). Their actions against sexual street harassment have included *Did you ask for it?*, which encouraged women to send scanned photos of the clothes they were wearing when they were sexually harassed and the #meettosleep action, where groups of women challenge gendered expectations of public space by sleeping in parks. Their 'Step by Step Guide to Unapologetic Walking' seems particularly pertinent for a discussion of the potentials of critical *flâneuserie*. This action challenged their online network of 'Action Heroines' to think about and alter their gendered walking practices. Their instructions read:

'*walk* very very slowly. *walk* without your phone. *walk* without your eyes fixed to the ground. *walk* in the middle of the pavement. *walk* with your chin a little raised. *walk* without your bag. *walk* without your sunglasses. *walk* with your shoulders leaned back. *walk* looking at passersby. *walk* alone. *walk* alone. *walk* at 5am. 3am. 2pm. Noon. Midnight. 8pm. 3pm. *walk* humming a song. *walk* whistling. *walk* day dreaming. *walk* smiling. *walk* swinging your arms. *walk* with a skip. *walk* alone. *walk* wearing clothes you always wanted to wear but could not because you thought you might be 'asking

for it'. *walk* without a dupatta. *walk* without your arms folded. *walk* without a clenched fist. *walk* smiling. *walk* smiling. *walk* smiling.' (Blank Noise, 2008)

While the network is one of predominantly English-speaking, middle-class women and we might ask *who* feels able to put their body on the line by taking on the mantle of 'Action Shero', Mitra-Khan argues that Blank Noise have been critically reflexive of their privileges, pointing to their work with civil society groups, their translation of their campaigns into vernacular Indian languages and their halting of a campaign that was critiqued for characterising perpetrators as lower caste/working class men (2012: 124). This is walking that is not only attuned to how different forms of power unfold in and through public space but uses walking as direct action to challenge the status quo. It is at once an individual action that is made collective through the collation of these walks online through social media.

Conclusion

This intervention aimed to move away from the figure of the *flâneur* in order to propose a critical *flâneuserie* made up of *flâneuse* fragments – ideas borrowed from a range of women activists, academics and artists – who use walking in their research and practice. The intention was to go beyond discussing the work of 'the usual suspects' in discussions of walking, to rethink what feminist walking as a critical method looks like and could look like in the future. At the heart of this endeavour is the idea that feminist critical walking practices can provide insights into the urban and make visible and challenge forms of spatial dominance – including those of gender, race and class. I wanted to join up these *flâneuse* fragments to suggest a range of propositions for critical feminist walking.

This is not to suggest that all flâneuserie must tick a set of boxes. On the contrary, by drawing across these very different forms of walking, I hope to point to the diffuse ways that walking can be used. Thus, my final proposition is for a flâneuserie that *can provide insights into the urban without claiming to be complete or universal*.

To summarise, the flâneuserie I am advocating here:

- a) is attuned to how different forms of power unfold in and through public space
- b) uses attunement to power as the basis for interventions that challenge the status quo
- c) uses walking to read the past, present and futures of spaces, against the grain
- d) recognises that experiences of walking are situated and embodied rather than universal
- e) is multiple and based on a collective effort
- f) provides insights into the urban without claiming to be complete or universal.

While I was briefly tempted to write these propositions in the form of a manifesto, this seemed 'out of step' with the kind of walking practice I am advocating here, which is communally formed, unfinished and constantly evolving.

Bibliography

- Baudelaire, C. (1964) *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, London: Phaidon.
- Benjamin, W. (1999) *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Blank Noise (2008) 'Step-by-Step Guide to Unapologetic Walking' <http://www.blanknoise.org/step-by-step-guide-to-unapologetic-walking> [last accessed 29th June]
- Cadogan, G. (2016) 'Black and Blue' in *The Fire this Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*, Jesmyn Ward (ed), London: Bloomsbury.
- Elkin, L. (2016) *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, London: Chatto and Windus.
- Larsen, N. (2014 [1928]) *Quicksand & Passing*, London: Serpent's Tail.
- Mitra-Khan, T. (2012) 'Offline Issues, Online Lives? The emerging cyberlife of feminist politics in urban India' in *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*, Srila Roy (ed) London and New York: Zed Books.
- Motts, C and Roberts, S.M. (2013) 'Not Everyone Has (the) Balls: Urban Exploration and the Persistence of Masculinist Geography', *Antipode* 46 (1), pp. 229-245.
- Puwar, N. (2004) *Space Invaders*, London: Berg.
- Puwar, N. (2010) 'The Architecture of parliament: Flâneur as a method in Westminster', *Feminist Legal Studies* 16 (3), pp. 298-312.
- Ross, E. (2018) 'Wandering in the Presence of Women: *Les dites cariatides*', *Cléo: A Journal of Film and Feminism* [<http://cleojournal.com/2018/04/11/wandering-in-the-presence-of-womenles-dites-cariatides/>] last accessed 29th June 2020.

Self, W. (2007) *Psychogeography*, London: Bloomsbury.

Simmel, G. ([1903], 2010) 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds) *The Blackwell City Reader*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Sinclair, I. (2015) *London Overground: A day's walk Around the Ginger Line*, London: Hamish Hamilton.

Sinclair, I. (2002) *London Orbital*, London: Penguin.

Sinclair, I. (2003) *Lights out for the Territory: Nine Excursions in the Secret History of London*, London: Penguin.

Varda, A. (1984) *Les dites cariatides* 12min.

Wilson, E. (1991) *Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the control of disorder and women*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolff, J. (1985) 'The Invisible Flâneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society* 2(3), pp. 37-46.

Wright, C. (2020) 'Walking whilst being Blak Outside' in *Industria* June 2020, pp. 26-35.