

# WALKING IN THE CITY

## Urban Space, the Body, Performance Art

by

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### Abstract

Most often walking in the city is purely functional; it is the disregarded locomotive between two locations. However, if one can walk through space and travel between places, then walking can also be considered as a mobile practice of investigating the social structure of cities.

Hence, this dissertation intends to revisit the act of walking and its potential as an urban design method in deciphering the built environment. It constructs new architectural knowledge by forefronting walking in the city as a performative strategy in understanding urban spaces. It is less concerned with the structuring of cities by static objects such as houses, but focuses instead on the urban flux – the ephemeral relationships formed between the users, objects and ideas within a city.

Developed upon the theories of the social production of space and the politics of the city (Henri Lefebvre), and the urban experience of everyday life (Michel de Certeau), this dissertation is a re-interpretation of Lefebvre's three representations of space – Perceived, Conceived and Lived – through an investigation into performance art in Singapore. This trans-disciplinary approach adopted explores the embodied notion of architectural space (Iain Borden), giving rise to a new analysis of urban experience as variously known as – 'felt', 'known' and 'thought' spaces.

Two walk-performances *Let's Walk* and *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* by Singaporean artists Amanda Heng and Tan Kai Syng respectively, are taken as key case studies for this dissertation. From these two walks, I then synthesize a third walk-performance. By doing so, I hope to contribute an original understanding of Singapore's urban space; drawing close attention to how the city may be experienced and understood by physically walking through it.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Lilian Chee  
Title: Assistant Professor

*To my glorious King,*

*Jesus Christ.*

# WALKING IN THE CITY

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*Isn't it really quite extraordinary to see that,  
since man took his first step,  
no one has asked himself why he walks,  
how he walks,  
if he has ever walked,  
if he could walk better,  
what he achieves in walking ...  
questions that are tied to all the philosophical, psychological, and political systems  
which preoccupy the world.*

Honoré de Balzac

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(10, 195 words)

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I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken. *Psalm 62:1-2*

*Mom, Dad and Fidel,*

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Thank you for all the laughter!

*Amanda Heng, Tan Kai Syng, Kai Lam, Lee Wen, Cecily Choo and WITAS,*

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction



*You'll never get it if you don't slow down, my friend.*

*What do you mean?*

*I mean you are going too fast, you're hardly even looking at the pictures.*

*But ... they are all the same ...*

*They're all the same, but each one is different from every other one. You've got your bright mornings and your dark mornings. You've got your summer light and your autumn light. You've got your weekdays and your weekends. You've got your people in overcoats and galoshes, and you've got your people in T-shirts and shorts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. And sometimes the different ones become the same, and the same ones disappear. The earth revolves around the sun, and every day the light from the sun hits the earth at a different angle.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> A dialogue between characters Auggie Wren and Paul Benjamin in the movie *Smoke*, directed by Wayne Wang (Miramax Film, 1995).

## 1.1 Rethinking the City

In Wayne Wang's movie *Smoke*, the character Auggie Wren owns a cigar shop at the corner of Third Street in New York and has a photographic obsession with taking pictures of his shop. He photographs his own corner from the same spot across the street at eight in the morning everyday without fail. One night, when Auggie decides to show his collection of more than 4,000 photographs to his customer Paul Benjamin, he reveals that one would not be able to fully appreciate the beauty of his pictures unless one 'slows down'. Heeding Auggie's advice, Paul starts to pay attention to the anonymous details captured in Auggie's pictures, and to his surprise he spots his late wife in one of them. Confronted by the past, Paul breaks down in tears.<sup>2</sup>

Wang's use of *misc en scene* speaks volumes about the way we look and think about the city today. Through Auggie's obsessive hobby, he led viewers to new findings of New York's Third Street. Such documentations, though repetitive in nature, paints a surprisingly persuasive image of the city. It is an image beyond the Chrysler Building or the 19<sup>th</sup> century row-houses at Brooklyn; but is instead one that brings focus to New York's ordinariness – the everyday happenings at Auggie's own little corner at eight in the morning.

People say you have to travel to see the world; sometimes I think that if you'd just stay in one place and keep your eyes open, you're gonna see about all that you can handle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This scene from the movie can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpCpsExvD4Q>, (accessed: 19 August 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Auggie Wren quoted from Wayne Wang's *Smoke* (Miramax Film, 1995).

Such processes in understanding the city urge the urban dweller to rethink and re-evaluate the unimportant and overlooked aspects of the urban space. And by doing so, they are offered ‘an opportunity to discover something new, and through their own agendas and perspectives find a new mapping and a way of thinking about cities’.<sup>4</sup> Be it having breakfast in the park, wandering along the streets, or rubbing shoulders with complete strangers on a crowded train, the real city exists in the everyday routine that encircles us.

This dissertation takes on an approach that is akin to such a process. Resembling Auggie’s pictorial records, this paper is less concerned with the structuring of the city by static objects such as houses, but focuses instead on its urban flux – the ephemeral relationships formed between the users, objects and events within urban space. It is interested in how the city is experienced and mapped in the mental life of a regular urban dweller and aims to achieve this by ‘slowing down’ and scrutinizing the familiar.

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<sup>4</sup> Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell (eds), *Strangely Familiar* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.9.

## 1.2 Performing (in) the City

It starts with a step and then another step and then another that add up like taps on a drum to a rhythm, the rhythm of walking. The most obvious and the most obscure thing in the world, this walking that wanders so readily into religion, philosophy, landscape, urban policy, anatomy, allegory and heartbreak.<sup>5</sup>

The act of walking, this most fundamental of all human activities, can be understood as a resistance against fast-paced urban living where speed is most often privileged; it stands out because its pace is unlike the mainstream. Equally, walking is a culture that is against the tempo and estrangement of the industrial revolution. As such, by drawing references back to Auggie's counsel to 'slow down', this dissertation revisits the familiar act of walking as means to discover the (un)expected and (un)predicted in modern urban living.

Taking the walk as 'a mobile practice of interacting and observing the social fabric'<sup>6</sup> is not particularly new in the discipline of urban studies. Walking has long provided planners a way to 'encounter sites in motion and in relationship to one another'<sup>7</sup>, and thus allowing them to understand the city beyond its conventional architectural representations. It operates in a similar mode as Auggie's photographs in that it considers places as non-static and allows room for the urban fabric to be understood in its narrative terms. Walking not only opens up new potentials for architecture by allowing one to simply move through space, it has also created a new field in the discipline of art where such actions in space become performance.

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<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Horodner, *Walk Ways* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2002), p.27.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), p.188.

By rethinking the city as being performed, walking becomes an artistic medium – giving artists a platform to challenge the notion of a ‘white cube’ gallery space. In such cases, Rebecca Solnit states that:

Art ceased to be a craft-based discipline of making objects and become a kind of unbounded investigation into the relationship between ideas, acts, and the material world ... Artists’ bodies themselves become a medium for performances, and as art historian Kristine Stiles writes, “Emphasizing the body as art, these artists amplified the role of process over product and shifted from representational objects to presentational modes of action”.<sup>8</sup>

Such artistic experimentations allowed performance artists to destroy the conventional notion of the term *gallery* by relocating ‘meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context’.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this shift, the city is then re-presented as the new gallery itself. Quoting Fat in their article ‘It’s Not Unusual: Projects and Tactics’, such contestations in the term *gallery* proposes:

... architecture at its very limit – an architecture that arises out of provisional and negotiated relationships between objects, environments, and programs ... These projects construct new urban experiences by the redistribution of the gallery program through a variety of existing urban situations.<sup>10</sup>

Taking cues from both the discipline of urban design and performance art, this dissertation sets forth a trans-disciplinary approach in its methodology; forefronting walking as a performative strategy to decipher of city spaces of Singapore.

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<sup>8</sup> Solnit, *Wanderlust*, pp.268-289.

<sup>9</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Fat, ‘It’s Not Unusual: Projects and Tactics’, in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell (eds), *The Unknown City* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.343.

### 1.3 Walk the walk:

#### The Path of the dissertation

In the opening chapter ‘Urban Bodies: A Device for Experiencing the City’, I examine some key theories pertaining to the experience of the city; rooted mainly in the theories of the everyday. Critical questions concerning the current status of urban planning – concepts central to modernist ideologies of the city – are raised anew in the chapters’ first section. The discussion here takes account of the ways in which the recent trend of computer-aided representations of cities would seem to betray the ‘life’ of urban experience that inspired architecture in the first place. As such, the chapter sets the premise for the main argument by adopting a viewpoint of the urban walker’s perspective. The second section of the chapter poses questions concerning the everyday space occupied by the body of the walker. It focuses on the discussion of a new analysis on an embodied representation of experience in urban space – what I call ‘felt’, ‘known’ and ‘thought’ spaces – by developing theoretical references from Henri Lefebvre’s writings on spatial production.

The following chapter ‘Bodies in Action: The Art of Walking in the City’ charts the dissertation’s empirical contexts through an analysis of artist group Art Harbor’s project at the Urban Typhoon Workshop 2006. It examines the relationship between art and the urban user, and thereby underscores Joseph Beuys’ notion of a Social Sculpture where ‘everybody is an artist’.<sup>11</sup> The second section of this chapter introduces a trans-disciplinary methodology for discussion; where the act of walking in the city is revisited and re-presented through the artistic discipline. Drawing on a

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<sup>11</sup> David Thistlewood, (ed.), *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press & Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1995), p.190.

detailed analysis of the works of walk-artists Vito Acconci and Janet Cardiff as case studies, this chapter highlights how walking as a stimulating creative act is constructive for architectural discourse and especially so for the study of cities.

In the final chapter 'Experiencing the city of Singapore in three walk-performances', I analyze the proposed 'felt', 'known' and 'thought' spaces according to three walks performed by Singaporean artists Amanda Heng and Tan Kai Syng, and myself respectively. These three walk-performances attempt to capture and further develop the essence of Lefebvre's Perceived-Conceived-Lived spatial relationship by using the body as a device and walking as a practice. It investigates the profound nature of walking according to the different levels of human experience and thereby suggests that the city, as experienced by the urban walker, can be dissected in a similar way to Lefebvre's 'trialectic' of space.

## Chapter 2

# Urban Bodies: A Device for Experiencing the City



*The Urban Body is the blur of movement captured on a time-lapse camera. It is the reverse of the static materiality of buildings, asphalt, street furniture, trees etcetera that our discipline prioritizes. But it is itself material. It is not the substance of society, but it is the substance of the social city.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cited from 'Urban Body trans-disciplinary studio brief for MSc2 Electives 2006' at Delft University of Technology, <http://www.urbanbody.org/madrid/Urban%20Body%20Semesterbook%202006.pdf>, (accessed: 19 August 2008).

## 2.1 The Experience of the City

The virtual reality animation company Planet 9 has recently completed the most detailed internet city to date. Modeled on the city of San Francisco, this artificial cityscape features nearly every building in the Bay Area, including no less than 4,000 accurately-drawn facades...According to the designers, it's 'the most complete virtual city in existence'. Yet for all its fascinating detail and the undoubted technological achievement, there is something radically wrong with this urban vision: a bristling concrete jungle it may be, but the streets are eerily empty. There are no cars, no weather, no electric current and no pedestrians: it is San Francisco after the neutron bomb – silent, pointless, dead.<sup>13</sup>

In today's cities, planners are faced with the challenge to create urban spaces that facilitate both the conscious conceptions and ideas of space, as well as the lived experience of the urban user. In his book *Breathing Cities: The Architecture of Movement*, Nick Barley points out that in the current practice of urban planning there is an apparent imbalanced focus between the static aspects of the city i.e. buildings and infrastructure and the more dynamic aspects of urban life that make cities more 'human'. Using the computer-generated vision of San Francisco as an example (fig. 2.1.1), Barley highlights that with the advent of computer-aided designs, the practice of urban planning seems to be less in touch with reality – it has successfully mastered architectural representation digitally but at the expense of the actual experience of a place. Even though such operative tools allow for quick and radical construction options, they fail to translate the delights of the city into the principles of urban design. Such conceptions, as described by Barley, are similar to one 'after a neutron bomb' – devoid of people, relationships, movement and ideology. Or in other words, these are representations of cities without experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Nick Barley, *Breathing Cities: The Architecture of Movement* (London: Birkhäuser, 2000), p.5.



Figure 2.1.1: A virtual San Francisco by Planet 9. (Source: Planet 9 website, [http://www.planet9.com/demos/P9\\_Virtual\\_San\\_Francisco\\_L.jpg](http://www.planet9.com/demos/P9_Virtual_San_Francisco_L.jpg), accessed: 17 August 2008)

Such tendencies in urban planning traces its influences back to the early 1930s where functionalist planning strategies were dominant. Quoting James Donald in his book *Imagining the Modern City*, he writes:

Le Corbusier's own damning judgment was often expressed in familiar metaphors and images of the city as a sick body. The slums of industrial cities were cesspools of tuberculosis and cholera, spreading contagiously and destroying the surrounding countryside like a disease. In place of the strong skeleton of a healthy organism, the sprawling metropolis displayed morbid symptoms; its circulation clogged, suffocating for lack of air, its tissues decaying in their own noxious wastes ... Although Le Corbusier used organic metaphors of disease when describing existing cities, his prescriptions were always couched in terms of the city as machine.<sup>14</sup>

Donald argues that even though planning ethics systematized by Le Corbusier adopt the analogy of a human body for the city, they still proposed to organize and reconstruct the city as a machine –

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<sup>14</sup> James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.57.

mechanized in a highly logical and legible mode. Such methods conceptualize the city as a utopian ideal from a macro-scale perspective; advocating the structuring of urban space on the grid plane. As such, the experience, relationships and imagination of a city are overlooked; resulting in a pale stimulation of the 'life' of the urban space. The demonstration of such functionalist approaches is apparent in Le Corbusier's symbolic Radiant City (figs. 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). Donald identifies these planning principles as the key reason why cities today still remain as 'theoretically rigorous systems'<sup>15</sup>, echoing John Kaliski in his article 'The Present City and The Practice of City Design'. Kaliski argues:

The tension between modern architecture's quest for the conceptually pure and the plurality of the modern city defines the fundamental dilemma of the twentieth-century urban design.<sup>16</sup>

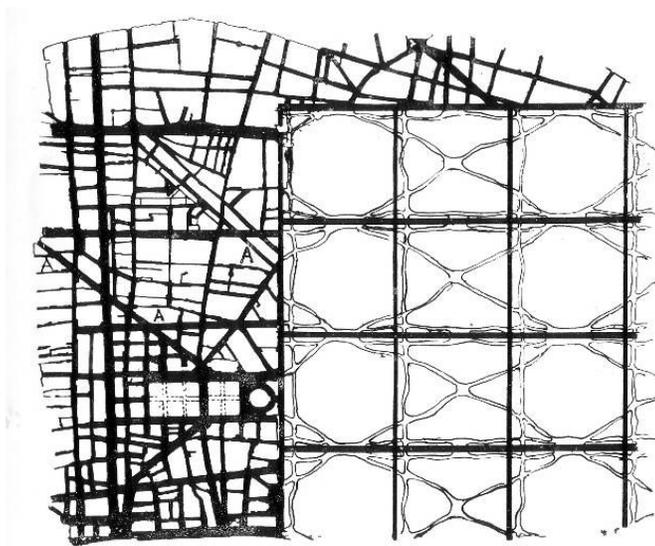
The Radiant City embraced the critique of urban density and sought to improve the lives of working men and women in the machine-age society through the skillful separation of uses, people, buildings and nature. Such rigorous techniques were so consistently pursued in this model that it sabotaged Le Corbusier's initial notion of the city as a living organism; it destructed the situational rhythm and experience of the urban and more importantly, the encountering of daily life in the city. In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre describes The Radiant City as 'a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness in general ... with the worst kind of abstraction'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, p.59.

<sup>16</sup> John Kaliski, 'The Present City and The Practice of City Design', John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski (eds), *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), p.90.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.381.



1922: Here the two networks appear:  
In the era of the horse. In the era of the automobile.

Figure 2.1.2: The plan of The Radiant City, showing Le Corbusier's favoritism on grid planning. [Source: Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933), p.203.]



Figure 2.1.3: The model representation of The Radiant City is similar to Planet 9's computer-aided stimulation of a virtual San Francisco in that they are both devoid of cars, weather and people. [Source: Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933), p.207.]

Archigram's Peter Cook writes that 'when it rains in Oxford Street, the architecture is no more significant than the rain'.<sup>18</sup> As such, the situational rhythm and experience of the city can therefore be defined as the invisible relationships that are formed between users, objects and events within the urban realm. Taking the illustration of rain in Oxford Street, the experience of the city of London can be seen to be closely related to its weather conditions (fig. 2.1.4). As water droplets fall, exposed pedestrians dash across streets for shelter and umbrellas open up in sync; generating urban actions that give form to space. Created from sound, movement, and bodies, the event of rain in Oxford Street offers a brilliant example of an actual experience of a place. And such experience of the city constitutes the everyday vitality of the urban scape whereby the urban user's body takes precedence.



Figure 2.1.4: Rain in Oxford Street, London. (Source: [http://farm1.static.flickr.com/40/84502099\\_4e0a4a770c.jpg?v=0](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/40/84502099_4e0a4a770c.jpg?v=0), accessed: 17 August 2008)

<sup>18</sup> Peter Cook, cited in Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), p.55.

## 2.2 Everyday Space as Occupied by the Body

Design within everyday space must start with an understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place there. This goes against the grain of professional design discourse, which is based on abstract principles, whether quantitative, formal, spatial, or perceptual. Whatever the intention, professional abstractions inevitably produce spaces that have little to do with real human impulses<sup>19</sup>.

Consciously departing from concepts relating to The Radiant City, the approach taken behind the design of everyday space lies within the notion that architecture is more than just an *object*. The architectural discipline has for a long time prioritized the projection of explicit forms (compositions) in its practice. Echoing Cook, architecture should instead be concerned with the relationships between places and actions (arrangements) – the essential element of everyday life. In *The Unknown City*, Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr and Alicia Pivaro write:

... architecture is not composed of isolated and monumental objects. Architecture is ambient and atmospheric, and architecture allows us to tell stories – ... spatial stories. Ultimately, then, architecture is less the constitution of space than a way of watching and comprehending the spatiality of the city.<sup>20</sup>

This perspective concurs with Michel de Certeau's writing in *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which de Certeau affirms the relationship between the user with his/her urban environment:

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<sup>19</sup> John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski (eds), *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), p.10.

<sup>20</sup> Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell (eds), *The Unknown City* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.4-5.

Analysis shows that a relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact.<sup>21</sup>

As such, this dissertation draws upon spatial theories that support the notion that space is a (social) production in that we make space and space makes us, over and over again.<sup>22</sup> To illustrate these ideas, I propose an analysis of space through Henri Lefebvre's writings to uncover the multiple social relations embedded in space and thereby to begin to understand the city through Lefebvre's three spatial representations, namely Perceived, Conceived and Lived space.<sup>23</sup>

In Perceived space, Lefebvre refers directly to the real and material world. It is the space that can be empirically observed and mapped. It is both a space of objects of concrete things and a space of movements. Encompassing both everyday life and urban activities, this representation is the space that we perceive before considering concepts and experiences.<sup>24</sup> The Conceived space exists as imagined representations of reality. By this Lefebvre means the conscious conceptions and ideas of space as typified by the abstract understandings advanced by 'experts', for example in urban planning, architecture or science. They are mental and intellectual constructions of a place, based on a mix of knowledge and ideology which are further reduced to verbal and graphic signs such as maps and plans. He termed such projections of life as 'representations of space'.<sup>25</sup> In Lived space, simultaneously real and imagined places are projected. Such spaces, also known as 'representational spaces',<sup>26</sup> are spaces that are truly experienced.

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<sup>21</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.xi.

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.26.

<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.38-41.

<sup>24</sup> Borden, Kerr, Pivaro and Rendell (eds), *The Unknown City*, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.40-46.

<sup>26</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.39.

With Lefebvre's spatial categories as the theoretical backdrop, this dissertation focuses on a new analysis which emphasizes the embodied representation of everyday space through the proposed categories of 'felt', 'known' and 'thought' spaces. These three spaces follow a sequential process much like that of Lefebvre's categorization of Perceived, Conceived and Lived space, but instead focus specifically on the different levels of human experience. Taking cues from Paul Lutus' article 'The Levels of Human Experience', I wish to formulate three key levels of experiential space as embodied by the urban user in the city. The first level of experiential space – 'felt' space – represents the passive sensory experience of a human body and depicts a stage of emotions without reason.<sup>27</sup> This space resonates largely with Lefebvre's ideology of Perceived space where the materiality of the world takes priority. The second category – 'known' space – is space where human experience engages knowledge with some measure of reasoning; it is a level of reasoning within both frameworks of personal beliefs and factual accounts.<sup>28</sup> Like Conceived space, this second category deals chiefly with the mental and intellectual interpretation of place. The third and last category – 'thought' space – exemplifies space where the urban user begins to construct new ideas based on his/her existing knowledge of a place.<sup>29</sup> This category of space reflects the nature of Lived space in that both can be understood as the 'edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be forged'<sup>30</sup> and it is within this category of space that new realities are often formed.

Operating in a similar way to Lefebvre's three-fold spatial relationship, these three categories co-exist simultaneously in the urban user, and affect his/her urban perception and experience. In

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Lutus, 'The Levels of Human Experience', <http://www.arachnoid.com/levels/>, (accessed: 20 August 2008)

<sup>28</sup> Lutus, 'The Levels of Human Experience'.

<sup>29</sup> Lutus, 'The Levels of Human Experience'.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Soja, 'Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination', in Alan Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.28.

specific places and at different times, these categories are combined in different ways and each individual representation will be more or less important in determining the experience of the city.

Concurring with Iain Borden in *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, this dissertation acknowledges that:

Space-Production cannot then be reduced to theories of it, but (it) must be seen as a process involving not only theories but also practices, objects, ideas, imagination and experience.<sup>31</sup>

And as such, this chapter sets the premise for the next where the dissertation will elaborate on the particular practice chosen, that of walking, to illustrate these urban theories.

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<sup>31</sup> Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p.11.

## Chapter 3

### Bodies in Action: The Art of Walking in the City



*This most modern art discipline – Social Sculpture/ Social Architecture – ... will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism. Only then ... would democracy be fully realized.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Joseph Beuys cited in Linda Weintraub, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s-1990s* (Litchfield: Art Insights, Inc., 1997), p.179.

Before starting the analysis of walking itself, this chapter begins by examining artist Joseph Beuys' notion of a Social Sculpture where he campaigned to establish an active and participatory democracy – asserting that everybody should be a sculptor of the social organism. In his 1971 performance entitled *Save the Woods*, Beuys led a group of students in a protest against deforestation in Düsseldorf. Beuys' performance, which involved the participants sweeping the forest with their brooms, demonstrated his idea of a Social Sculpture in that it was both a political (protesting) and artistic (sweeping) act simultaneously. In *Save the Woods*, each participant involved earned the title of an 'artist', much like Beuys himself, and their joint efforts against deforestation were considered works of art. In his formulation of the concept of Social Sculpture, Beuys' wrote:

*EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST* who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand – learns to determine the other positions in *THE TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER*.<sup>33</sup>

Beuys' view is not unlike Lefebvre's writings on the politics of the city in which the latter questions the privileged position of the architect-planner in the formulation of cities. Lefebvre maintains that everyone has a right to the city; and that people assert this right through everyday space (or Lived space) which contains the potential for creativity, for change, and even revolution. The social production of space, working through Lived space can redirect the real world towards the desires of the users rather than the abstracted Conceived space of modern design. Much like Beuys, Lefebvre urges us to 'let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!'<sup>34</sup>, and that society as a whole should be considered as a work of art to which everyone can contribute creatively.

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<sup>33</sup> Thistlewood, (ed.), *Joseph Beuys*, p.190.

<sup>34</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, tr. Sacha Rabinovitch (London: Continuum, 2000), p.204.

### 3.1 Art and the Urban User:

#### Through the case study of Art Harbor at Urban Typhoon workshop

In June 2006, Urban Typhoon Workshop<sup>35</sup> invited local residents of Shimokitazawa, a small quaint area in Tokyo notably famous for being a student town and home to many interesting tiny bars and restaurants (fig. 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), to brainstorm on the future planning of their urban environment. Operating much like Beuys' idea of a Social Sculpture where 'everyone could become a participant rather than a member of the audience, (and) that everyone could become a producer rather than a consumer of meaning'<sup>36</sup>, the opinions and participation of urban denizens were engaged together alongside architecture students, urban planners, professional architects, graphic designers, artists, musicians, sociologists, dancers, media artists and political activists to produce an alternative to the master plan of the Municipality of Setegaya (figs. 3.1.3 and 3.1.4). This master plan proposes a 26 meter-wide road that cuts through the northern part of the neighborhood, destroying the quintessential essence of the area – a low-rise, local scale, and community orientated neighborhood, drastically changing it into a commercial center similar to Shibuya and Shinjuku in Tokyo (fig. 3.1.5). The aim of the workshop was to bridge the gap between the intentions of urban policy makers and the reality at the local level by advocating better communication between both parties, and also to serve as a starting point for further discussions regarding the residents' right to their city.

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<sup>35</sup> Urban Typhoon is an experiment in global team working and participatory design. Their portfolio can be accessed at: <http://www.urbantypphoon.com>

<sup>36</sup> Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.216.



Figures 3.1.1 & 3.1.2: Shimokitazawa is a low-rise, local scale and community oriented neighborhood in Tokyo, Japan. (Source: Author's photographs 2006)

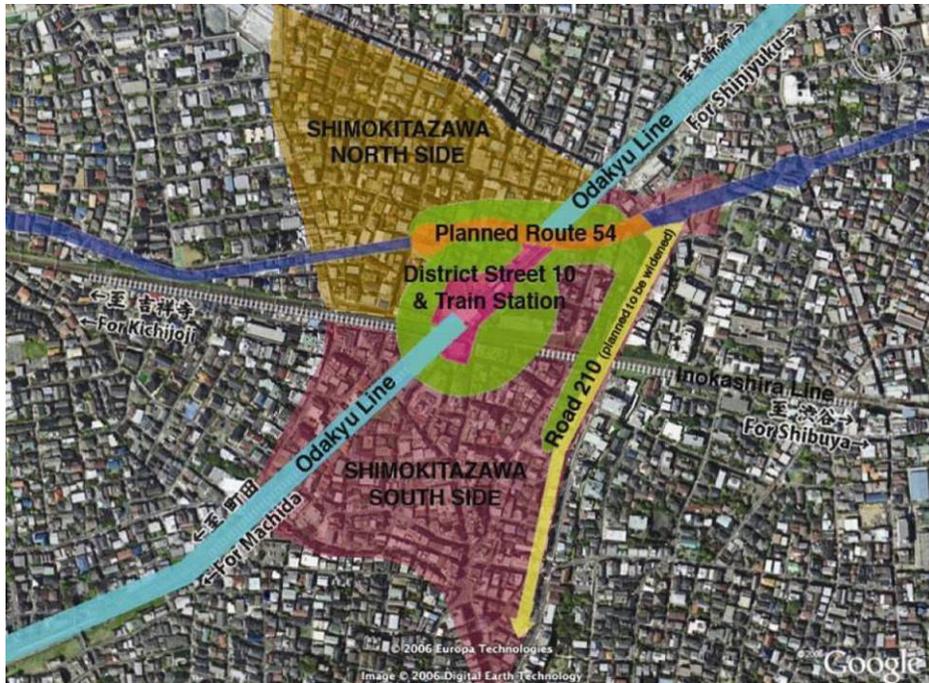


Figure 3.1.3: Map of Shimokitazawa showing the master plan of the Municipality. (Source: Urban Typhoon workshop report, <http://www.urbantypoon.com/UrbanTyphoonREPORT.pdf>, p.6, accessed: 1 August 2008)

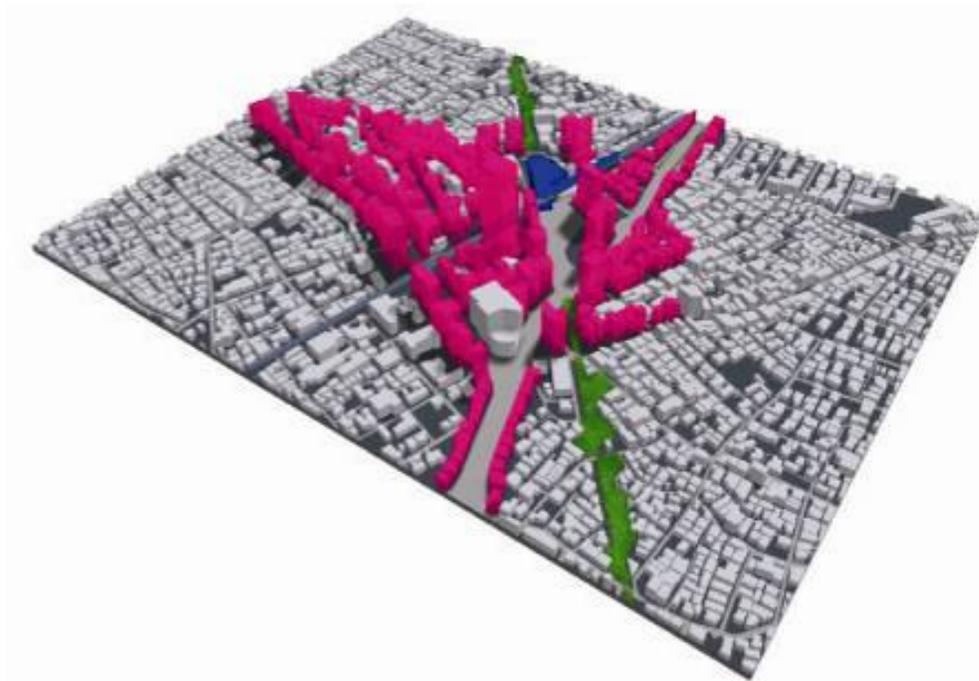


Figure 3.1.4: Projection of future development in Shimokitazawa showing buildings heights (indicated in pink) of master plan's new implementations. (Source: Urban Typhoon workshop report, <http://www.urbantypoon.com/UrbanTyphoonREPORT.pdf>, p.6, accessed: 1 August 2008)

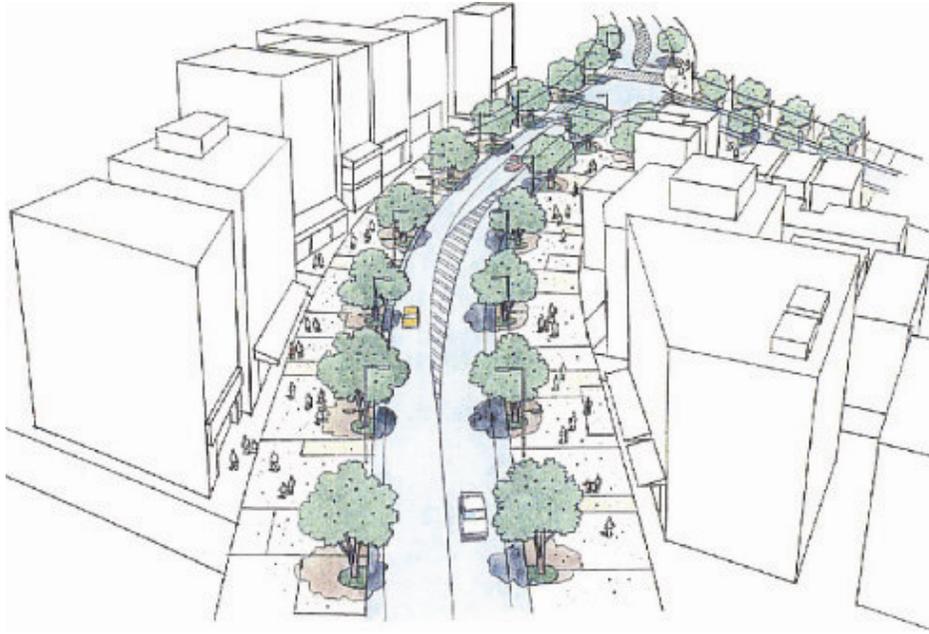


Figure 3.1.5: A vision of the 26 meter-wide road proposed in the new master plan for Shimokitazawa, showing high rise buildings and orderly aligned trees that disrupts the original street level scale of the area. (Source: Urban Typhoon workshop report, <http://www.urbantypphoon.com/UrbanTyphoonREPORT.pdf>, p.6, accessed: 1 August 2008)

Art Harbor<sup>37</sup>, one out of the thirteen participating groups at the Urban Typhoon workshop 2006, managed an urban design proposal that took the form of a “portable talk station” where residents were interviewed on an ad-hoc basis to have their opinions featured (fig. 3.1.6). A first glance of this proposal may fall short as an urban planning incentive but surprisingly it highlighted certain pertinent issues with regards to the normative “top-down” approach of modern urban planning methods. Comprised mainly of foldable furniture, battery-powered microphones, hand-held video cameras and a green carpet, the talk stations oppose normative urban planning methods by drawing the planners’ attention to the scale of the local street. They advocated that streets were crucial in the understanding of the users of urban spaces; that users should be viewed as active rather than passive agents in the city. Art Harbor also posed a challenge to expand the scope of studies of cities beyond their physical and operational components by introducing an element of movement into their

<sup>37</sup> Art Harbor is a loose group of collaborators from Japan and across the world. Led by Lehan Ramsey, artist and professor at Future University in Hakodate, Art Harbor uses art to make people think about their environment and imagine other possible worlds by proposing various projects and workshops since 2001.

proposal. This portability allowed the group to move freely from one location to another; focusing on the spaces-in-between (the ephemeral) as opposed to the built fabric (the solid) of the city, whilst accepting that the two are intimately coupled. By literally bringing the talk station out of its usual physical containment and directly to the streets, Art Harbor investigated the problematics of architectural representation i.e. the structuring of urban spaces using static objects such as houses.



Figure 3.1.6: Art Harbor's "portable talk station" outside Shimokitazawa train station in Tokyo, Japan. (Source: Author's photograph 2006)

Although Art Harbor acknowledged the need to understand architectural space through physical buildings, they also realized the importance of relationships that prevailed within the city. Their street "talks" are an example of how such relationships are manifested within the urban realm. During a particular conversation with a New Yorker who resided in Tokyo, he revealed that his

memories of home in West Village were often rekindled through the local scale of streets and “energy” of Shimokitazawa. Such compelling personal stories and multiple histories of the city and its residents magnified how memory and meaning of a place is established at the scale of both individuals and the community (fig. 3.1.7). It is an exemplification of creative value in everyday life and its users, and how they can no longer be regarded as passive agents or “merely the obscure background of social activity”.<sup>38</sup> As Jonathan Hill argues:

In the formulation of architecture, when the role of the creative user is considered to be as important as that of the architect, neither is superior to the other. Contrary to expectations, recognizing the user as creative may augment, not diminish, the status and value of architects’ skills.<sup>39</sup>

Hill argues that users of the city, like architects, have the potential to (re)invent and (re)create the city. In a similar way, Art Harbor’s proposal laid down a theme of great relevance for urban communities in Japan and around the world – that cities should be created both from above (urban policy makers) and below (local residents). Such a stand echoes Lefebvre’s writings on the politics of the city when he observed that in modernist planning, the Perceived space of everyday life and the existing real world, and the Lived space of underground practices and imagination were often ignored in the professional and theoretical Conceived space of planners and architects. As such, Art Harbor’s unusual proposal of a “talk station” is an attempt to address this overlooked aspect in the practice of urban planning by highlighting that although space contains things, it is not just about objects but sets of relations between things.

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<sup>38</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.xi.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture: Architects & Creative Users* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.89.

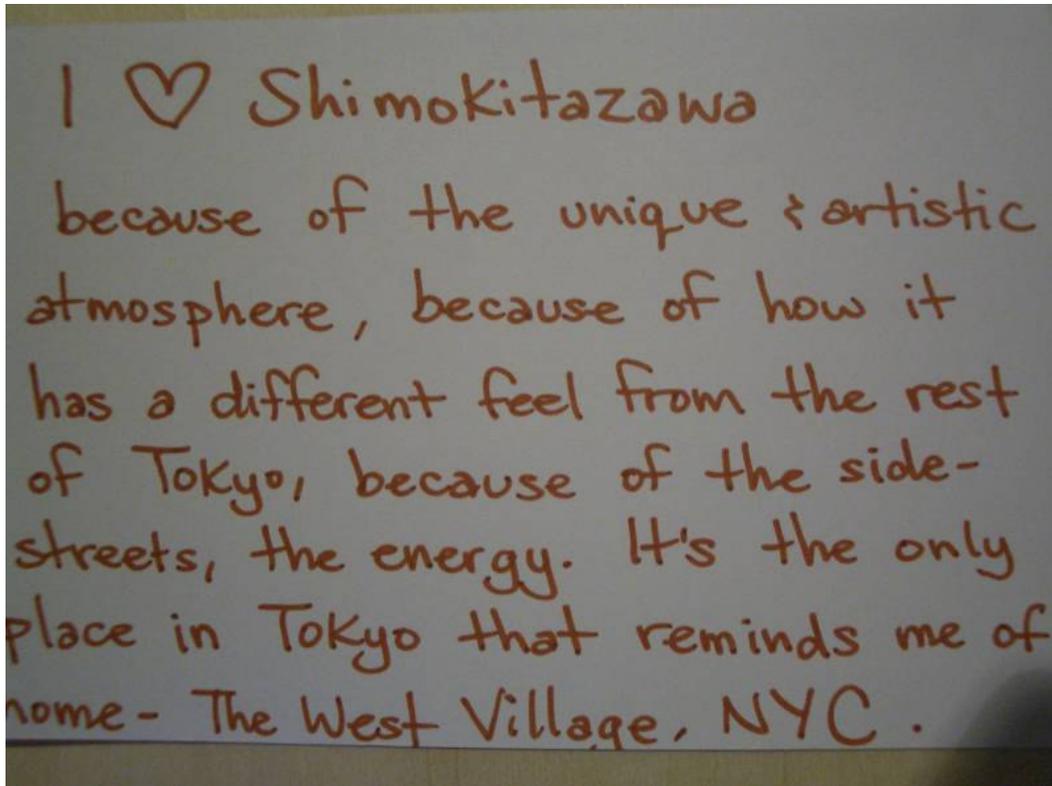


Figure 3.1.7: A record of a New Yorker's thoughts about living in Shimokitazawa during the "talk show". (Source: Author's photograph 2006)

Just as architects were demonized as the destroyers of the city, artists were unrealistically asked to salvage it. At some basic level, there was a hope that art could revive an old idea of the city ...<sup>40</sup>

Art Harbor, through their artistic experimentations in the urban spaces of Shimokitazawa, managed to discover fresh insights about the city that may have been neglected by architects and planners alike. They illustrated the benefits of adopting a trans-disciplinary approach in urban planning, echoing Lilian Chee in her book review of Francis Stark's 'The Architect and the Housewife'. Chee writes:

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<sup>40</sup> Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), p.21.

The context for architectural discourse is seldom discussed since it is widely assumed that such discourse operates exclusively within the discipline. However, in the case of Stark's 'The Architect and The Housewife', the disciplinary limits, contexts and subjects of architectural discourse are displaced into another creative practice, that is, art. Here, architecture is cast as part of a complex constellation of practices, relationships, objects, habits and spaces ... How is architecture interpreted and used outside of architecture?<sup>41</sup>

Art in the case of the "portable talk station" provided a platform for Art Harbor to demonstrate their alternative pair of eyes in reading the city, and in so doing addressed various relationships within a city – an aspect that the existing professional practice and architectural discourse leave little or no room for. Art Harbor argues from the discipline of art that cities are a social product rather than produced by the "top-down" planning of policy makers; and that such social production occurs at the street level of everyday life within the city:

From the top of an office tower, or from a viewpoint on a surrounding hill, it is possible to see the city as a map, its pattern and scale of streets, squares and green spaces set out two-dimensionally. From the distant viewpoint, it is not possible to see people as such – from a building of medium height they merge like ants into pools of activity and disperse into emptiness or shadow. Even from two levels above the street they become anonymous.<sup>42</sup>

"Top-down" planning adopts a viewpoint of distance that emphasizes the city as a single idea. Such notions point towards an ideal city where everything within it is orderly and highly legible, much like Le Corbusier's *The Radiant City*. Though plans are space generators, they cannot personalize space nor replace the experience of a city. One shortcoming of such approaches in urban planning is that it fails to recognize the city at its micro scale and more importantly, the contribution of its

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<sup>41</sup> Lilian Chee, 'Pillow Talk', book review of Francis Stark, *The Architect and The Housewife* (London: Bookworks, 1999), in *The Journal of Architecture*, v.12 n.3 (2007), p.333.

<sup>42</sup> Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and The City* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.21-22.

users. Casual encounters, personal engagement and interactions – elements that suggest the city’s incidental character are all found at the street level, not from “the top of an office (ivory) tower”. The city is a more than just a machine for living in; it is a collage of details experienced through exchanges and above all, by walking through its streets.

### 3.2 Walking as Performance Art and Architectural Device for the City

By relating one location to another in a particular sequence, walking provides a way of practising space through time and time through space. As a critical spatial practice, walking operates in ... rethinking place as unfixed and site as performed.<sup>43</sup>

Art Harbor's introduction of movement in their artwork is not particularly new within the artistic discipline. Such action-based art resonates largely with the nature of artworks pursued by performance artists of the late 1960s when there was a radical rethinking of the art object – with the emphasis shifting away from the static artwork to one that engaged more directly with its audience. Artist Vito Acconci, who quite literally walked out of the conventional gallery and into the city, conceived a performance entitled *Following Piece* in 1969 that forefronted walking as means to perform art. Having similarities with Art Harbor's "portable talk station", *Following Piece* likewise employed the act of movement to re-think the "white-cube" gallery space and investigated how human to human engagement can be better fostered by breaking down physical boundaries. In this walk-performance, Acconci followed a different person at random through the streets of New York for 23 days. He followed them, much like an obsessive stalker, until they disappeared into private spaces (fig. 3.2.1). By mobilizing the artist's workplace, Acconci challenged the traditional notions of sites for art, and proposed that the city itself could be conceptualized as an art gallery. He imagined fluid intersections with the city, creating public space for his art in a way that had tremendous influence<sup>44</sup> on other walk-based artists such as Amanda Heng and Janet Cardiff.

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<sup>43</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, p.185.

<sup>44</sup> Finkelppearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*, p.25.



Figure 3.2.1: Vito Acconci, *Following Piece* performed in New York, 1969. (Source: [http://www.tate.org.uk/images/cms/12768w\\_boundtofail1.jpg](http://www.tate.org.uk/images/cms/12768w_boundtofail1.jpg), accessed: 15 September 2008)

In one of Heng's walk performance entitled *Let's Walk with Amanda*, she likewise challenged the notion of *gallery* by bringing her audience from the artist's studio to a hawker center located in Marine Parade.<sup>45</sup> At the hawker centre, Heng employed the act of laying out table cloths to instantly transform the casual hawker center into a place of formality (fig. 3.2.2). After the performance, Heng laid down red canvas cloth on the road to lead her audience back to the gallery (fig. 3.2.3). During the course of Heng's performance, her actions not only can be understood as transitory alterations to the hawker center that she performed in but also as a shift in spatial politics – from the exclusivity of the artist's studio to the hawker center, much like Acconci's *Following Piece*.

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 1: Interview with performance-artist Amanda Heng, 13 May 2008, Singapore.



Figure 3.2.2: Amanda Heng laying table cloths in *Let's Walk with Amanda*, Marine Parade Hawker Center, Singapore, 2000. (Source: Amanda Heng 2000)



Figure 3.2.3: Amanda Heng laying red canvas on the roads as she leads her audience back to the art gallery in *Let's Walk with Amanda*, Marine Parade Hawker Center, Singapore, 2000. (Source: Amanda Heng 2000)

In the course of a walk we usually find out something about our companion, and this is true even when we travel alone.<sup>46</sup>

Cardiff's series of provocative "audio tours" – in which her recorded voice steers viewers (wearing headphones attached to a media player) as they maneuver through the city's landscapes – are also investigations into experiencing the city through the physical action of walking. In her walk-performance entitled *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, Cardiff directs her viewers' attention with site-specific comments and ambient noise, creating a confused reality made up of Cardiff's own sense of what is happening versus what has just happened for the viewers themselves. Her body of artwork usually constructed to transmit stories with an open-ended or linear trajectory has been described to be like walking with a "ghost".<sup>47</sup> Cardiff's walks challenge urban users' perception of place by displacing them against her own voice that was recorded previously; provoking a dual experience that is both in and out of sync with the environment they are in. In so doing, she renders familiar places as strange and untried:

Where is the listener? They're walking with me, and walking in my footsteps, so they become part of me in a way, but it's kind of like you're in my memory; you're listening to my memories, but they become the present for you. It's a really complex weaving of time.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Horodner, *Walk Ways*, pp.13-15.

<sup>47</sup> Horodner, *Walk Ways*, p.21.

<sup>48</sup> Janet Cardiff, 'Janet Cardiff and George Bures', in Stuart Horodner, *Walk Ways* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2002), p.21.



Figure 3.2.4: Janet Cardiff, *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* performed in London, 1999. [Source: Janet Cardiff, *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (London: Artangel, 1999)]

*The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* also illuminated a particular urban type defined by Walter Benjamin – the flâneur – who is in many ways like Cardiff herself in that both are characterized as an observant solitary person who spends his/her time perusing the sprawling city. Perhaps taking cues from Benjamin’s flâneur, cultural theorist Guy Debord established the Situationist method of the *dérive*, a drifting technique of roaming in the city without the usual motives for movement (i.e. for work or leisure activities) but instead led by the whims of the terrain, with their ‘psycho-geographic’ effects.<sup>49</sup> The aim of these ‘psycho-geographical’ explorations was to bring out the social aspects of the topography and the affective dimensions of constructed space<sup>50</sup>; criticizing against the homogenizing and disciplining effects of functional urban planning. This perspective, coincidentally systematized by Lefebvre who was in close contact with the Situationists for a time, is once again a resistance against the structuring of cities as mere constructions of planners and architects.

<sup>49</sup> Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User’s Guide* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005), p.35.

<sup>50</sup> Alison Sant, ‘Redefining the Basemap’, [http://www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6\\_No2\\_interactive\\_city\\_sant.htm](http://www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6_No2_interactive_city_sant.htm), (accessed: 15 September 2008).

The Situationist map (fig. 3.2.5) presents the most drastic departure from the construction of functionalist planning theories in that it tears apart the conventional grid and then puts together a subjective interpretation of the city. It was derived by the co-opting of the map of Paris and then rearranging this map randomly to bring about new contestations in the city's logic. By this act of deconstruction, such maps recreate new terrains that favor marginalized spaces within the city; very much similar to how Art Harbor intervenes with the “in-between” spaces through the portability of their talk stations. Torn from their original geographical context, both the Situationists and Art Harbor used the methodology of walking to re-connect these fragmented “pockets” of urban spaces together. Torn from their original geographical context, both the Situationists and Art Harbor used the methodology of walking to re-connect these fragmented “pockets” of urban spaces together. Such ‘psycho-geographic’ walks propose a temporal experience of the city – an urban aspect that cannot be represented on a planar map.

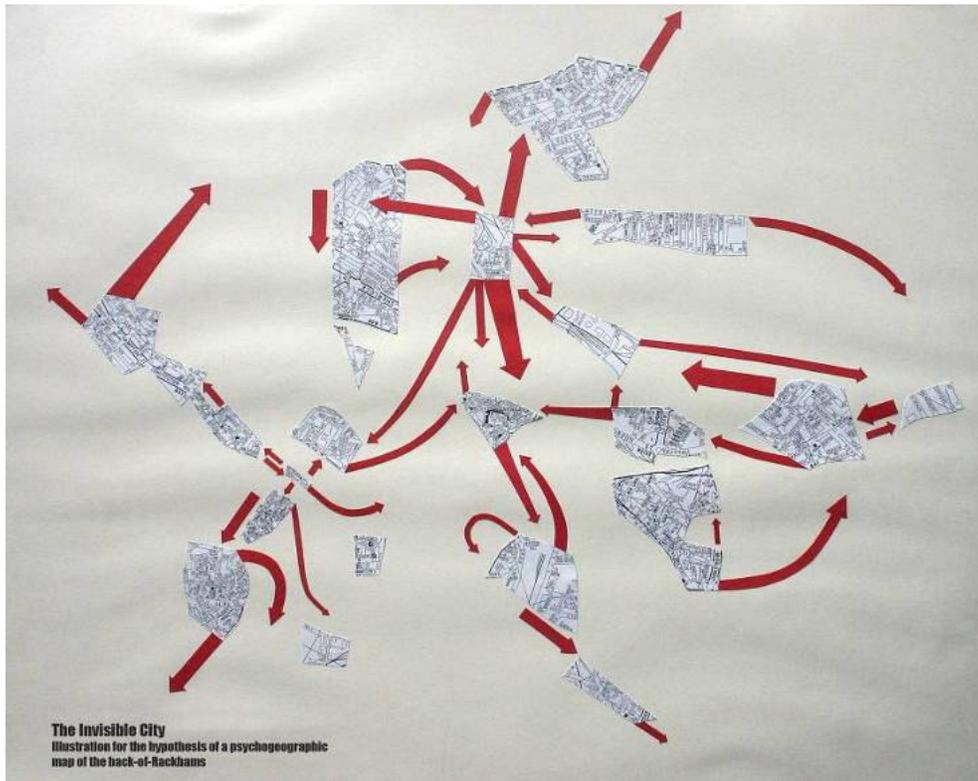


Figure 3.2.5: The Invisible City, a map resulted from a Situationist dérive. (Source: ‘Redefining the base map’, [http://www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6\\_No2\\_interactive\\_city\\_sant.htm](http://www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6_No2_interactive_city_sant.htm), accessed: 4 August 2008)

Walking in the city reveals profound connection between contemporary art, the urban space and the human body in motion. It also provides a way of understanding the city in flux, to encounter sites in motion and in relationship to one another. From the examples of Art Harbor, Vito Acconci, Janet Cardiff and the Situationists, it can be deduced that walking as performance art and as an architectural device in deciphering the city is an effective method. Since it not only allows us to address often overlooked aspects of urban planning, but creatively reconfigures the city anew.

Walking is natural.

Walking is individual.

Walking is about pace.

BODY

Walking is action.

Walking is movement.

Walking is about changes.

Walking is about possibilities.

Walking is mobility.

Walking is going places.

SPACE

Walking is about distance.

Walking is about the unknown.

Walking is an adventure.

Walking is about decisions.

Walking is about process.

Walking is about duration.

TIME

Walking is living in real time.

Walking is giving meaning to life.

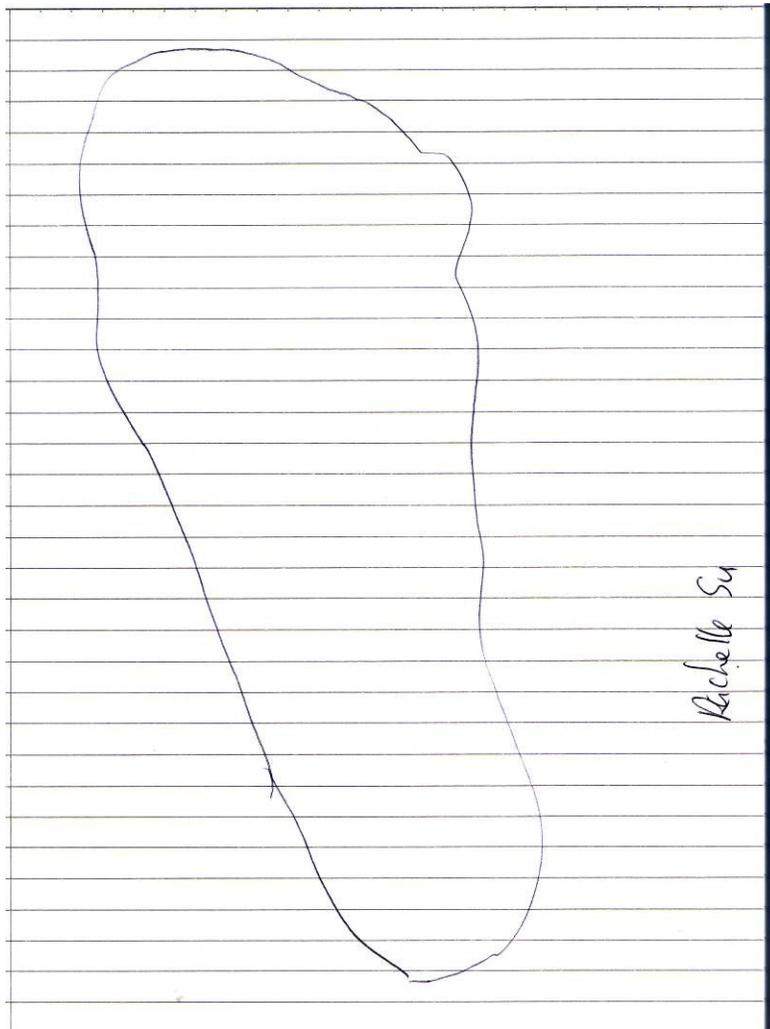
Walking is a commitment.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Amanda Heng, 'Let's Walk', unpublished text, obtained by author on 13 May 2008, Singapore.

## Chapter 4

# Experiencing the city of Singapore in three walk-performances



In this chapter, the urban spaces of Singapore will be re-interpreted in three walks which were devised as ways to decipher the city. Thus, it is significant to emphasize that the term *walking* in this dissertation is employed as a performative strategy rather than the day-to-day walk. This proposal takes its precedence from the previous chapter where the act of walking was investigated in the artistic discipline. Drawing references from Beuys' concept of Social Sculpture, the analyzed works of Art Harbor, Vito Acconci, Amanda Heng, Janet Cardiff and the Situationists' *dérive* trigger this dissertation's trans-disciplinary approach – one that is couched within the disciplines of performance art and architectural studies. In the following sections, I intend to explore the three proposed representations of space – 'felt', 'known', and 'thought' – as experienced by the body through the act of walking in the city.

This chapter begins with two walk-performances *Let's Walk* and *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* by Singaporean artists Amanda Heng and Tan Kai Syng respectively. Inspired by Lefebvre's argument against binary logic and the triadic nature of spatial production<sup>52</sup>, I go on to conceptualize and perform a third walk entitled *Let's Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*.<sup>53</sup> And as the name suggests, it is developed from Heng and Tan's walk pieces. This methodology serves to illustrate Lefebvre's analysis that:

... two terms are never enough to deal with the real and imagined world ... there is always an-Other term, a third possibility that works to break down the categorically closed logic of the "either-or" in favor of a different, more flexible and expansive logic of the "both-and-also".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.39.

<sup>53</sup> Refer to *Let's Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* CD, a video recording of the author's walk-performance that was submitted as part of this dissertation.

<sup>54</sup> Soja, 'Thirdspace', in Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.20.

In this sense, my conceptualization and addition of a third walk is a reflection of Lefebvre's notion that a 'third' is often necessary in making practical and theoretical sense of the world as it is 'the beginning of a heuristic chain of "approximations" that builds cumulatively in an ever-expanding process of knowledge formation'.<sup>55</sup>

In Lefebvre's formulation of this triadic mode of spatial relationship, he further emphasizes:

That the lived, conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the 'subject', the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion – so much is a logical necessity.<sup>56</sup>

By this, he maintains that real space is always constructed in and through a combination of all three representations of space; that they are and can never be isolated from each other (fig. 4.1). Together they form a 'trialectic' where each realm affects both the others. In other words, one particular representation of space could dominate and subordinate the other two at any given time in space despite being closely interconnected. Hence with Lefebvre's model as a precedent, the following sections will attempt to analyze the proposed 'felt', 'known' and 'thought' spaces of an urban experience from three walk-performances in which one category of space could appear to be more prominent than the other two (fig. 4.2).

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<sup>55</sup> Soja, 'Thirdspace', in Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.21.

<sup>56</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

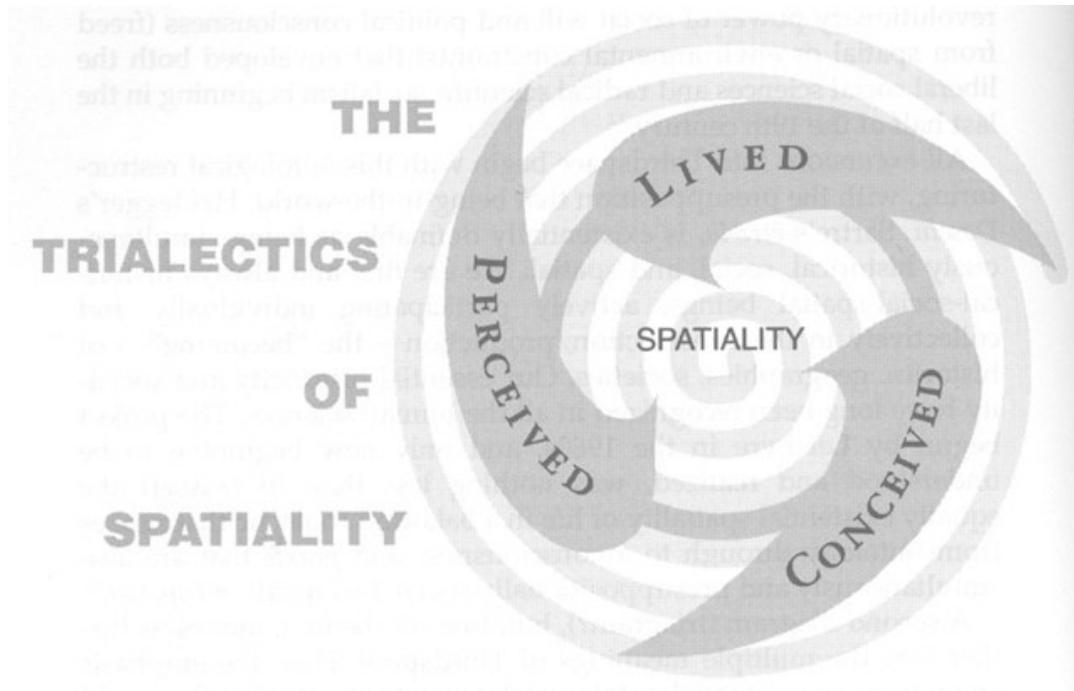


Figure 4.1: Edward Soja's diagram on the trialectic of spatiality. (Source: <http://www.cwru.edu/affil/GAIR/canada/sojaepist.JPG>, accessed: 17 September 2008)

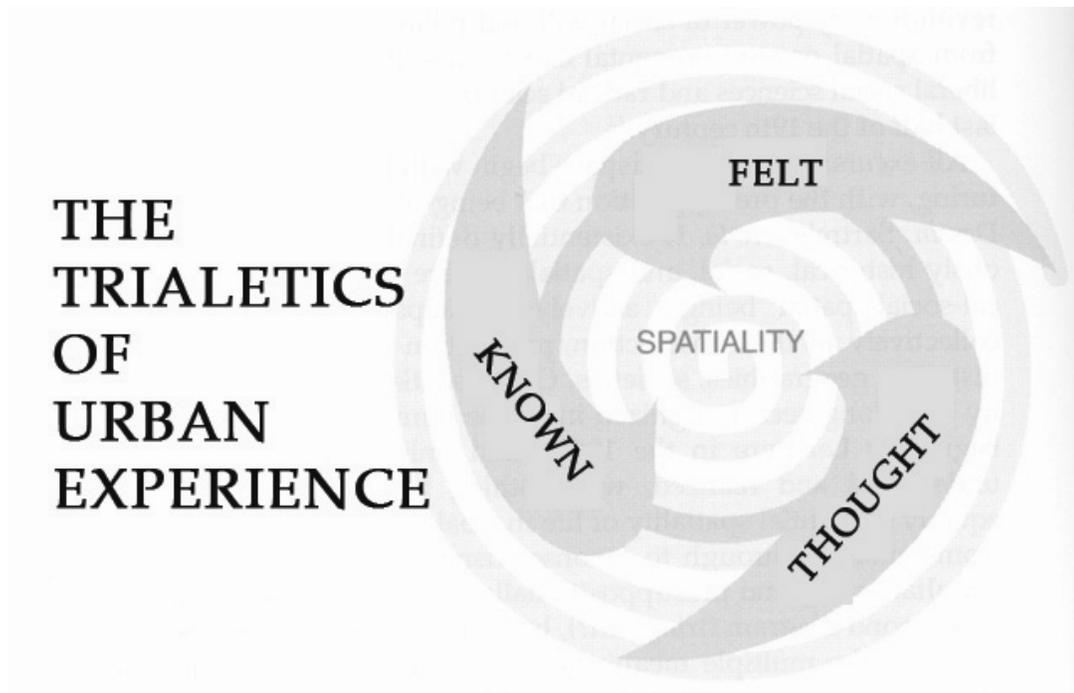


Figure 4.2: Developed from Edward Soja's diagram of Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality, the author proposes a new diagram in understanding the trialectics of urban experience. (Source: Author's image 2008)

#### 4.1 Walk #1: 'Let's Walk' by Amanda Heng

*Singapore, 1999; Indonesia, 2000; Japan, 2000; Spain, 2001*

In *Let's Walk*, Amanda Heng examines how the experience of walking as a physical action relates to modern day city living. During Heng's daily travels around the city, she observed how commuting, a common phenomenon of industrialized societies, has critically desensitized one's awareness to his/her immediate environments. Travelling in the city has become a routine where 'faster is better'. When we travel in the city, we are often so overwhelmed by our destination that we forget the journey. In an interview with Heng, she explains:

The whole idea was to show how we took walking forward for granted in our everyday lives, and that with a slight change in walking – that by walking backwards – we see how different walking can become. Fundamentally, we still reach our destination and complete our journey, but now we get to slow down and pay attention to the things around us.<sup>57</sup>

As such, *Let's Walk* is a walking performance conceived primarily to encourage city dwellers to go back to the basics of walking and to experience its process. It is an embarked journey in which Heng repositions herself as a woman in a city where the politics of gender and identity are often in continual contestation. This performance involves Heng physically walking backwards barefooted with a ladies' heeled shoe in her mouth and a mirror in her hand (fig. 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). This seemingly impromptu act elicits her apathy towards women's beauty standards. Gagged by heels, Heng silently protests against the wearing of them in order to be approved as a woman in modern

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 1: Interview with Heng.

society. She walks backwards, echoing her stance to go against the majority while being barefooted and 'choked'.



Figure 4.1.1: *Let's Walk* performed in muddy waters by Amanda Heng, Singapore, 1999. (Source: Amanda Heng 1999)



Figure 4.1.2: *Let's Walk* performed in an arcade by Amanda Heng, Japan, 2000. (Source: Amanda Heng 2000)

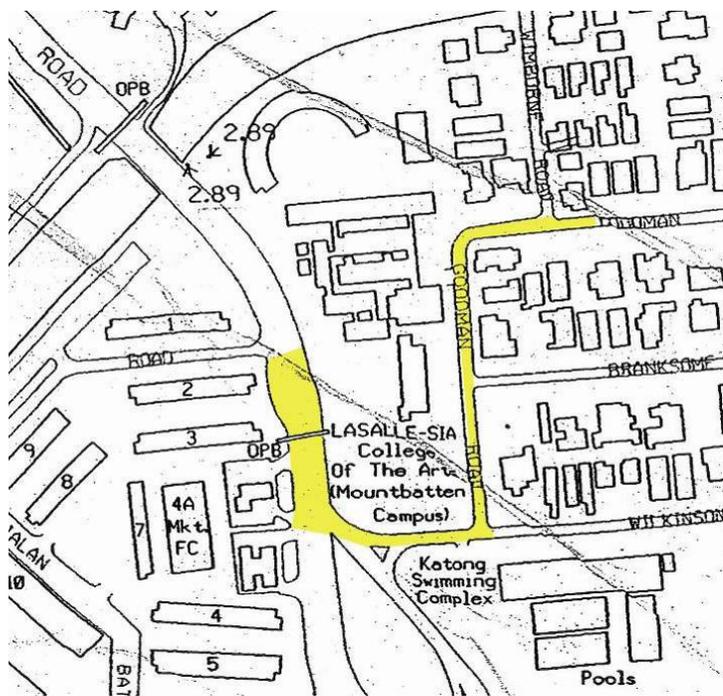


Figure 4.1.3: The trail taken (highlighted in yellow) by Amanda Heng during the performance of *Let's Walk* at Goodman Road, Singapore. (Source: Map archive at Information Resource Center, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore)

During a recent interview with the artist, Heng revealed that although *Let's Walk* was performed in four different cities, namely Singapore, Indonesia, Japan and Spain, its choreographed actions remain unchanged. It was first performed as a one-hour walking piece in Singapore at Old Goodman Road near the old campus of Lasalle College of the Arts; a place where Heng frequents (fig. 4.1.3). When questioned about the selection of performance sites, Heng uncovered that her works were generally performed at places of 'convenience' unless commissioned by art events.<sup>58</sup> As such, the artist works can be considered as non site-specific in nature but rather action-specific. And this specific action of walking backwards on bare feet is the starting point behind the proposal of 'felt' space (also further elaborated in the third walk) in which the city is understood by the passive sensory experience of a human body. Such method of walking in the city affects the understanding of Old Goodman Road in that it not only engages the walker's senses directly by exposing his/her feet to the feel of the ground surfaces and textures – an aspect of the city that would otherwise be seen and not felt – but also challenges one to walk in a direction (backwards) that often renders regular places as 'strange' and 'unfamiliar'. One of the audiences who participated alongside Heng in the walk commented:

Nauseous! Never have I felt so unsure of where I'm heading. My perception is constantly shifting and there is a need to re-negotiate my spatial relation with the surrounding and my fellow partners. A simple, mundane task made so difficult that I grew more aware of the experience of walking.<sup>59</sup>

Hence, the strategy of walking backwards has the ability to create such heightened awareness in the participants that the re-negotiation of their personal spatial relation with the immediate environment was unavoidable. With the feet as the main indicator of the things to come, they automatically

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix 1: Interview with Heng.

<sup>59</sup> Participant of Heng's *Let's Walk*, comment obtained by author from Heng's studio on 13 May 2008, Singapore.

become ‘detectors’ that pick up the understanding of a space purely by its materiality. In *Let’s Walk*, Heng experienced various types of grounds through the soles of her feet, which in turn affected her understanding of urban spaces – that the textures and temperature of the ground surfaces are accurate indicators of the nature of space that she is entering into. In an interview with Heng, she revealed that:

When I perform at different sites, there is whole different culture involved. For example, in Jakarta, I was performing in a space where it was really congested and the route was not on proper cement ground. I had to negotiate my way through the crowd and traffic and that became a very important aspect of the journey. For Spain, it was performed just outside an art center. And so, I was walking on the pavement and I could warn myself from the traffic with the help of traffic lights. It was also challenging because I realized that I have become a threat to the traffic; I sometimes interrupt their way and they had to slow down for me. The space then becomes meaningful because it allows me to react to it differently.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, this action-specific performance allowed Heng to decipher urban spaces in Jakarta and Spain respectively by matching the textures of the ground (rough cement or smooth pavement) to their cognitive cultures (random or systematized traffic systems) accordingly. As such, ‘felt’ space can be understood be as the predominant category of space that is being experienced in Heng’s *Let’s Walk* in which the other two categories (‘known’ and ‘thought’ spaces) are less apparent. ‘Felt’ spaces can usually be graphically mapped much like architectural maps and plans, but because I lack adequate knowledge of Heng’s walking experience (I did not partake in her walk physically), I shall offer no definite mapping for *Let’s Walk*’s ‘felt’ space. However, such mappings will later be demonstrated in my third walk whereby my own body becomes the actual device for experiencing the ‘felt’ space of the city.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 1: Interview with Heng.

<sup>61</sup> See p.62 of this dissertation for a graphical map of ‘felt’ space of Orchard Road.

#### 4.2 Walk #2: 'The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide' by Tan Kai Syng

*Singapore, 2007*

Commissioned and premiered at the Singapore Art show 2007 in a program entitled 'You are not a Tourist', Tan Kai Syng's *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* proposes the city as a protagonist. Using hand-held portable DVD players, audiences watch the videos as they toured Singapore's central city area of City Hall on foot (fig. 4.2.1). The artist presents herself as the tour guide in the video; giving instructional 'tips' to the audience on the exploration of the city. The two areas of focus within City Hall for this walk are Raffles City and City Link respectively (fig 4.2.2). The conceived video artwork for Raffles City is called 'Tour' and the other for City Link called 'Detour'. Except for name changes, both videos are identical. Tan's work engages with the disorientation and realities of urban life by the use of a word play whereby she problematizes the terms of well-known places or characters by a slight alteration in their spellings. For instance, City Link was re-named as 'City Sink' and 'City Wink', and Raffles City as 'Baffles City' and 'Waffles City' in the two videos; 'Local' versus 'Global'; 'Streetwalker' versus 'Flâneur' (fig. 4.2.3).

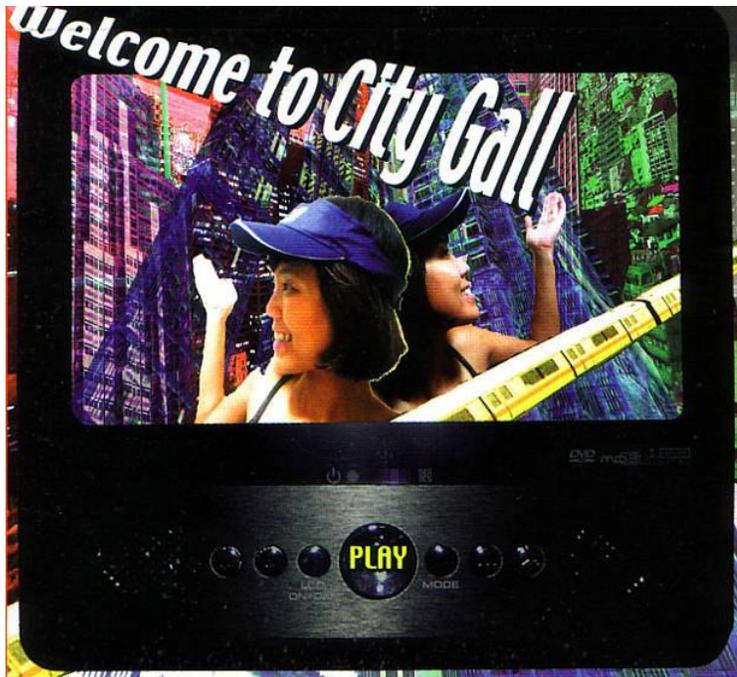


Figure 4.2.1: Hand-held DVD players used in *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* by Tan Kai Syng, Singapore. (Source: Tan Kai Syng 2007)

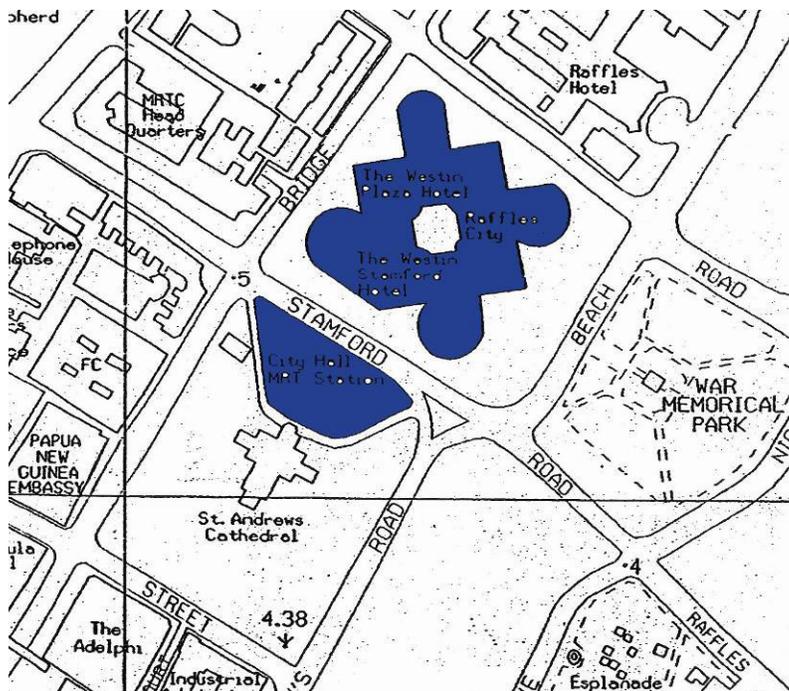


Figure 4.2.2: The areas in focus during the performance of *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* are Raffles City and City Link respectively (highlighted in blue), Singapore. (Source: Map archive at Information Resource Center, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore)



Figure 4.2.3: A pamphlet of *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*, video art conceived by Tan Kai Syng for Singapore Art Show 2007. (Source: Tan Kai Syng 2007)

In this interactive city tour, the audience does the walking instead of the artist herself. Thus, in a strict sense, *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* is not considered performance art since the artist does not perform. In comparison with Heng's *Let's Walk* series, one is able to observe a reversal of roles in the artist's and audience's stances. Unlike Heng who demonstrates the walk and later welcomes audience participation, Tan conceives her works by directly engaging her audience as a crucial part in the completion of her art. As such, this reflects Beuy's notion of a Social Sculpture in which 'everybody is an artist'.<sup>62</sup> In her work, Tan emphasizes the creative audience by means of her own death both literally and metaphorically when she portrays herself as the murdered victim at the end of the video. She echoes Roland Barthes in his book *The Death of*

<sup>62</sup> Thistlewood, (ed.), *Joseph Beuys*, p.190.

*the Author* in that her ‘death’ opens up new discussions about the creative audience and the city. Jonathan Hill in his book *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* draws parallels from Barthes and states that:

Through appropriation, the creative reader makes the text and the creative user makes the city ... The building is not directly comparable to the text. Instead, I suggest that writer-text-reader relations as a whole are analogous to architect-building-user relations.<sup>63</sup>

As such, *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* can be understood as a reflection of such relations but in the realm of art – artist-medium-audience – and by doing so, licenses the audience with a creative right to the city; much like a creative reader to the text.

In this performance, Tan makes a video of a walk in City Hall that consists of ‘instructions’ and narrative fragments to a ‘tourist’, the participant of her video game, who is enjoined to follow the route Tan has taken. Such ‘instructions’ juxtapose ‘here and there’ and ‘now and then’ to disorientate the creative audience by allowing them to at once enter into the past and present by the directions prescribed by Tan (fig. 4.2.4). In *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*, Tan occasionally invites her audience to ‘take a good look around you’, ‘walk up to the tallest building’ or ‘find your way out of here, to ground level’.<sup>64</sup> During such instances, the creative audience does not only responds to such prompting but, in the process of doing do, superimpose their own factual recordings (based on what he or she sees) of the city upon Tan’s own as he/she walks. This complex interweaving of multiple frames of time allows the audience to perceive not just the artist’s own memories of the route but also their own impressions of the performance site.

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<sup>63</sup> Hill, *Actions of Architecture*, pp.71-72.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix 2: Interview with video-artist Tan Kai Syng, 15 May 2008, Singapore.

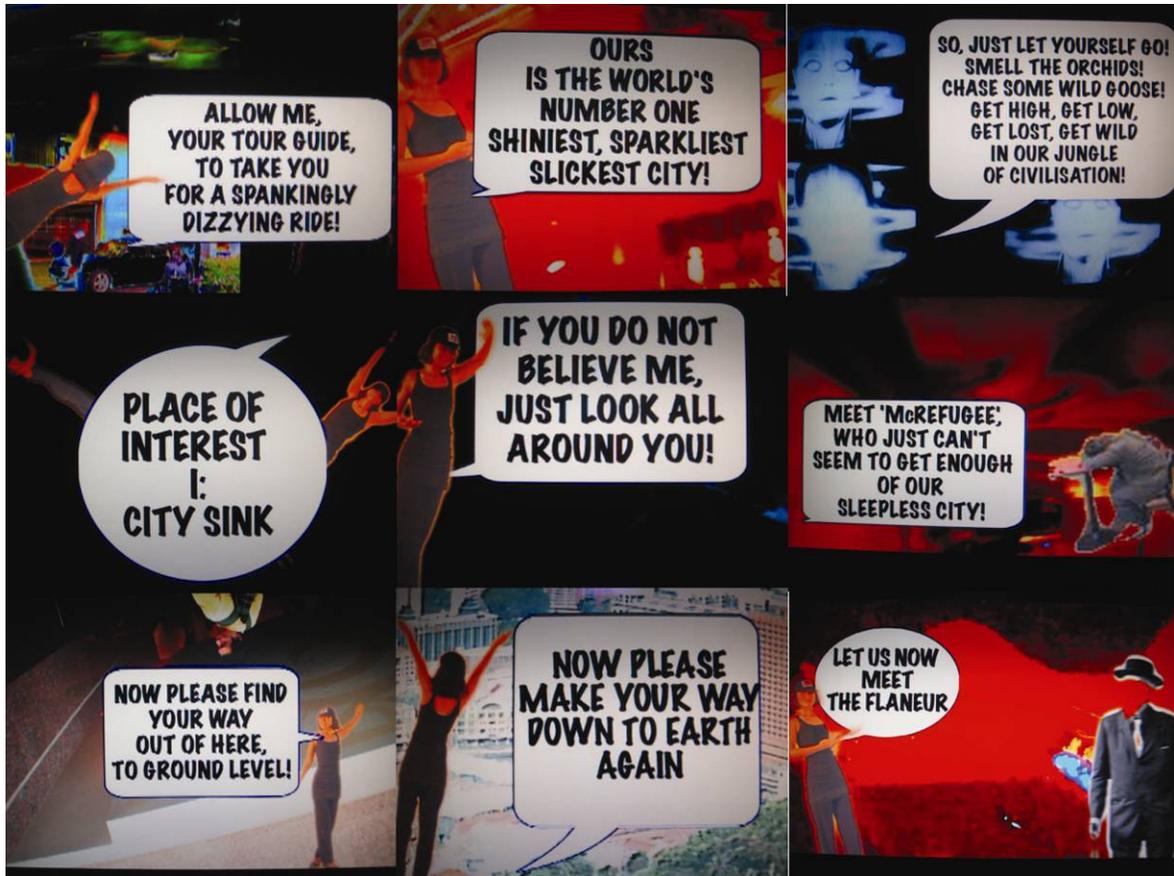


Figure 4.2.4: Some instructions that were being prescribed by Tan in *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*. (Source: Tan Kai Syng 2007)

Such interweaving of impressions upon a same site proposes the second category in the experience of urban space – ‘known’ space – in which the city can be understood through some measure of reasoning within both frameworks of personal beliefs and factual accounts. Such methods of walking in the city affect the understanding of City Hall in that the mental and intellectual interpretations of this place, though presented over space and time, give rise to a new and imaginatively inexhaustible map of City Hall that is being inscribed within the mind of the walker. In a similar way, this space can thus be understood as the platform where abstract understandings of a place – normally at the initial conceptual stages of a design process – can be formed. This new

map of City Hall (that is being created as the audience walks) is therefore his/her experience of the place reduced to graphical representations albeit a mental one.

Recounting Janet Cardiff's *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* in Chapter three, Tan's walk likewise harvests on the power of human cognitive memory (beliefs) and superimposes a new layer of knowledge based on facts. Both works create 'instructions' layered with historical narratives. They choreograph their audience through the city according to a route mapped out by their personal beliefs i.e. in Cardiff's case, she creates soundtracks based on places that she has previously revisited, and in Tan's case, she creates a visual trail of City Hall that was left behind by her in the making of her video (fig. 4.2.5).



Figure 4.2.5: A visual trail of 'City Gall' (City Hall) by Tan in *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*. (Source: Tan Kai Syng 2007)

This second category of space as experienced by the human body can therefore be described as:

... more subjective and 'imagined', more concerned with images and representations of spatiality with the thought processes that are presumed to shape both material human geographies and the development of a geographical imagination.<sup>65</sup>

It is the 'next-step' in the sequence of spatial experience (following the sequence of Felt-Known-Thought space) in that it is less concerned with the materially understood space (for example, by the feet in 'felt' space) and instead is more focused in investigating the 'more cognitive, conceptual and symbolic world'.<sup>66</sup> If 'felt' space is seen as providing the urban walker's basic empirical manuscript, then 'known' space represents the urban walker's thought process in the writing of such content. In the 'known' space, experience based on a mix of knowledge and ideology can be reduced to graphical representations such as maps and plans whereby there is a certain didactic instruction involved. This aspect resonates largely with Cardiff and Tan's prescribed directions involved in their walks. As such, 'known' space can be understood as the predominant category of space that is being experienced in Tan's performance in which the other two categories ('felt' and 'thought' spaces) are being subordinated.

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<sup>65</sup> Soja, 'Thirdspace', Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.18.

<sup>66</sup> Soja, 'Thirdspace', Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.18.

### 4.3 Walk #3: 'Let's Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide' by Rachelle Su

*Singapore, 2008*



Figure 4.3.1: Author performs *Let's Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* along Orchard Road, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)

Conceived primarily as a 'third' to the two walks by Heng and Tan, *Let's Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* mirrors Lefebvre notion of a triadic relationship between things.<sup>67</sup> In Edward Soja's book *Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination*, the 'third space' (Lived space) is being described as such:

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<sup>67</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

It privileges uncertainties, rejects authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities.<sup>68</sup>

Hence, in order to create a walk-performance that conveys the true nature of space in the third order, a set of parameters was given in the conceptualization of this walk with references drawn back from the preceding two walks by Heng and Tan which inspired this version. The relationships between the three walks can be as understood as in the following table:

<b>Artist</b>	<b>Amanda Heng</b>	<b>Tan Kai Syng</b>	<b>Rachelle Su</b>
<b>Title of work</b>	‘Let’s Walk’	‘The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide’	‘Let’s Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide’
<b>Activity</b>	Walking Backwards. Shoe in the mouth. Hand holding mirror.	Watching a video. Walking in the same site as the video.	Walking Backwards. Hands holding a laptop. Laptop has a mirror. Watching a video. Walking in a different site as the video.
<b>Location</b>	Goodman Road	City Hall	Orchard Road
<b>Start-End of Walk</b>	-	-	Orchard MRT Station-Mount Elizabeth
<b>Locational Coherence</b>	-	Coherent	Incoherent
<b>Party involved in walking</b>	Artist	Audience	Artist and Audience
<b>Human Experience (as influenced by Lutus’ analysis)</b>	Sensorial	Some reasoning involved	Constructs new ideas
<b>Space</b>	‘felt’	‘known’	‘thought’

Table 4.3.2: The relationships between the three walks.

<sup>68</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), p. 107.

I perform this third walk along Orchard Road, a prime area for commerce in Singapore, where I set out on my journey by walking backwards (inspired by Heng's *Let's Walk*) from Orchard MRT Station while following Tan's 'instructions' from *The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide* on a laptop. This performance site was selected to reflect the intentions of this dissertation; one of which is to find new readings in an extremely urbanized environment by means of 'slowing down'.<sup>69</sup> As such, Orchard Road was selected primarily because it is one of the busiest and most recognizable streets in Singapore. The other reason behind this purposeful juxtaposition of Tan's 'instructions' of City Hall upon Orchard Road was the influence of the Situationist map whereby the deliberate act of deconstruction (of Orchard Road) was appointed to bring about new contestations in the city's logic. And in a way, this can be considered as intentionally trying to lose oneself in the city much like the chief intention of a 'psycho-geographical' *dérive*.<sup>70</sup> This aimless excursion dictated by Tan's incoherent directions of City Hall concludes at a junction along Mount Elizabeth Road after traversing through The Paragon (fig. 4.3.3).

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<sup>69</sup> Recalling Auggie Wren's advice to Paul Benjamin in chapter one.

<sup>70</sup> Ford, *The Situationist International*, p.34.

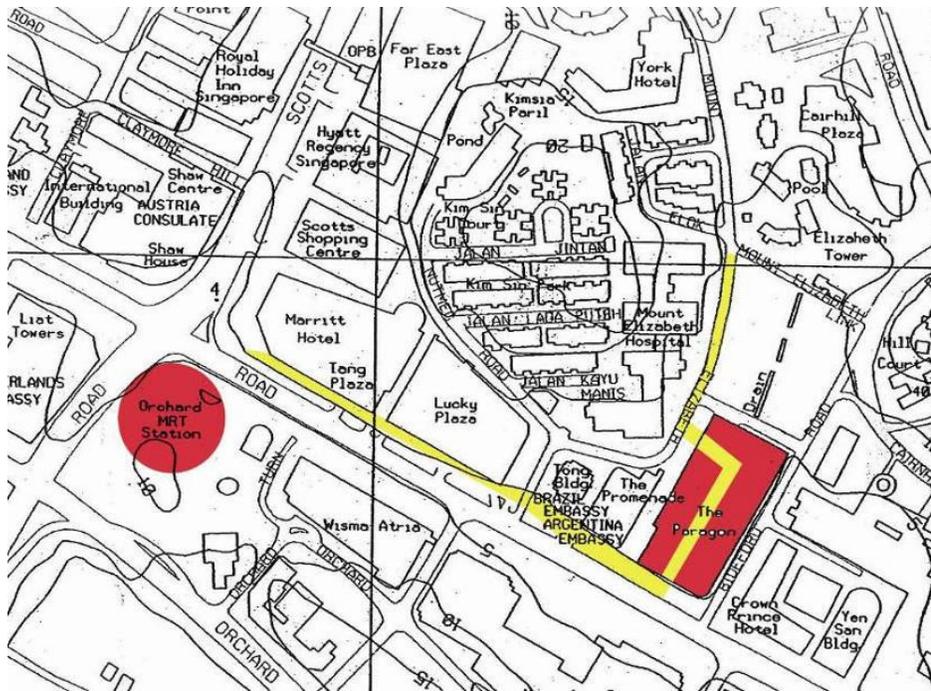


Figure 4.3.3: The trail taken (highlighted in yellow) by the author during the performance from Orchard MRT Station to Mount Elizabeth via The Paragon in Singapore (highlighted in red). (Source: Map archive at Information Resource Center, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore)

In Francis Aljys' 2001 performance entitled *The Collector* (fig. 4.3.4), the artist pulls a leashed magnetized 'pet' out on the streets and 'for an indeterminate period of time, the magnetized collector takes a daily walk through the streets and gradually builds up a coat made of any metallic residue lying in its path. This process goes on until the collector is completely covered by its trophies.'<sup>71</sup> Operating in an analogous mode to Aljys' 'pet', my feet can be identified as 'collectors' of dust and small pieces of rubble that were 'picked up' along Orchard Road during my walk-performance (fig. 4.3.5). Such actions allow me to interact with and survey the city through the direct experience of the ground that I step on; much like Amanda Heng in her experience of *Let's Walk*.

<sup>71</sup> Horodner, *Walk Ways*, p. 28.



Figure 4.3.4: Francis Alys' 2001 performance entitled *The Collector*. (Source: CSS BARD, <http://www.bard.edu/graduate/ccs/exhibitions/student/2002/thesis1/minoralterations/pic.jpg>, accessed: 22 August 2008)



Figure 4.3.5: The collection of build up on the author's feet after completing the walk-performance; showing small pieces of rubble and dirt. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)

Revisiting ‘felt’ space in Heng’s *Let’s Walk*, this first level of embodied space as understood as the ‘directly experienced world of empirically measurable and mappable phenomena’<sup>72</sup> shall be mapped in a manner that is akin to Heng’s texture-nature<sup>73</sup> understandings of urban space. In the case of my proposed walk, the indoor spaces are usually characterized by smooth and cold surfaces (figs. 4.3.6 - 4.3.8), while outdoor spaces tend to be rougher and more likely to be warmer, even to the point of scalding on a sunny day (figs. 4.3.9 - 4.4.12).



Figure 4.3.6: Author performs her walk on smooth tiles of indoor spaces. Picture taken at The Paragon, Singapore. (Source: Author’s photograph 2008)

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<sup>72</sup> Soja, ‘Thirdspace’, Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.17.

<sup>73</sup> Recalling Heng’s matching of ground textures (rough cement or smooth pavement) to their cognitive cultures (random or systematized traffic systems) in Jakarta and Spain respectively.



Figure 4.3.7: A carpeted surface is a common indicator of an approaching escalator. Picture taken at The Paragon, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.8: The gridded texture of escalators, as experienced by the bare feet, is a common feature of indoor space. Picture taken at The Paragon, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.9: Tiles of smaller sizes are common 'buffer' materials between interior spaces and the rougher surfaces of roads. Picture taken outside CK Tang Shopping Center along Orchard Road, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.10: Circular imprints on ground indicate danger, and that the author should either slow down or check for oncoming traffic. Picture taken outside The Paragon's entrance; facing Mount Elizabeth Hospital, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.11: Uneven surfaces of cracked rubble and grass are a combination that tells of a total outdoor space. Picture taken along Mount Elizabeth Road, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.12: Vehicular roads are the roughest and most dangerous surfaces experienced by the author's feet. This is a space of maximum exposure. Picture taken along Orchard Road, Singapore. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)

Therefore in many respects, the walks partaken by Heng and myself open many fresh perspectives and new possibilities in the reformulation of architecture and urban planning in that the city's overlooked qualities are being re-discovered through the sensory experience of the feet:

... brought to our attention neither historical facts and dates nor famous monuments or sites of architectural interest in the area, but rather the sort of stuff that is all around us but so ordinary that it remains ignored and invisible.<sup>74</sup>

And as aforementioned in the earlier section, representations of such neglected qualities of the city – one that is couched within the category of 'felt' space – can be achieved graphically by means of a mapping that is depicted in figure 4.3.13. Through this mapping of 'felt' space, a certain re-discovery of Orchard Road is realized; it revealed not only the latent characteristic pertaining to the urban space but also the architectural vocabulary that is embedded within the textures of the city's streets.

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<sup>74</sup> Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, p.184.

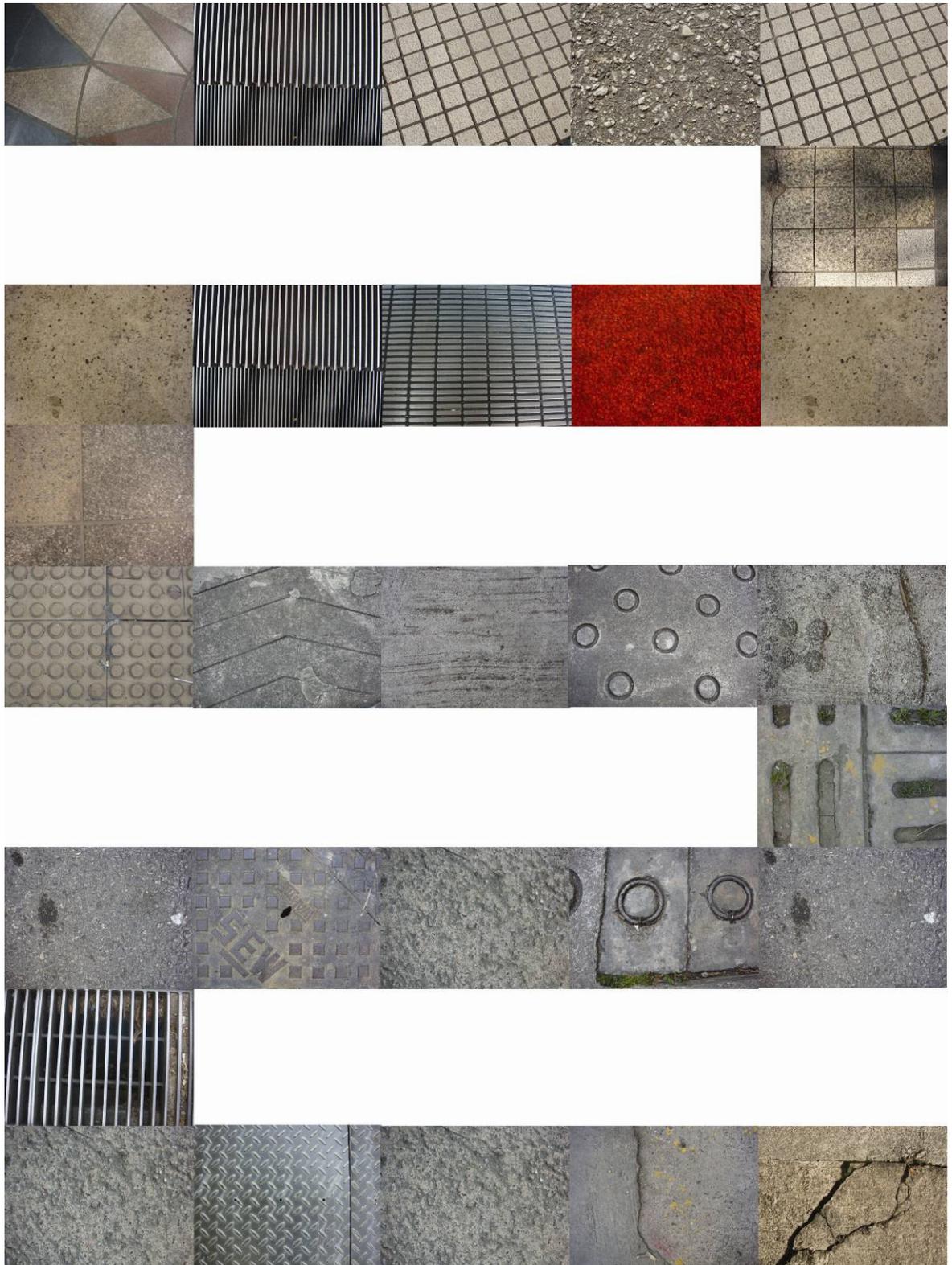


Figure 4.3.13: A graphical mapping of Orchard Road's 'felt' space starting from Orchard MRT station (top left corner) to a junction at Mount Elizabeth Road (bottom right corner) through the indoor spaces of The Paragon. (Source: Author's photographs 2008)

Other than this physically identifiable ‘felt’ component, this third walk also typifies what Edward Soja describes as Thirdspace<sup>75</sup> or ‘thought’ space as proposed in this dissertation in which:

It privileges uncertainties, rejects authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities.<sup>76</sup>

‘Thought’ space is therefore simultaneously an individualistic way of observing, looking, understanding, and interpreting the experience of an urban walker in the city. In such senses, it can be evaluated as space that is in constant production and reproduction; it is prone to renewal and continuous re-creation. In my performance *Let’s Walk the Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide*, I constantly travel between Orchard Road’s real and imagined spaces in a constant flux. During the course of the walk, I am prompted by Tan’s ‘instructions’ to use the act of walking as resistance to the conventional understandings of place and to create personalized maps (fig. 4.3.14).



Figure 4.3.14: ‘Walking as resistance: Creating your own map(s)’ as instructed by Tan’s video during the author’s walk-performance. (Source: Author’s photograph 2008)

<sup>75</sup> Soja’s Thirdspace refers similarly to Lefebvre’s notion of Lived space.

<sup>76</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace*, p.107.

Such resistance constructs new ideas and creates new realities by empowering ‘thought’ space with new communicative meaning. For social critic bell hooks, ‘thought’ space is:

a new political grounding for collective struggles against all forms of oppression, whatever their sources and at whatever geographical scale they are expressed, from the intimacies of the human body (what the poet Adrienne Rich once called the “geography closest in”) to the entrapments built in to the global political economy.<sup>77</sup>

She also understands ‘thought’ space as spaces ‘of radical openness ... (and) a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult ... it is not a “safe” place. One is always at risk’.<sup>78</sup> Likewise in the act of walking in the city, there are usually certain risk factors involved and especially so in the ‘thought’ realm where a high level of incoherence in the walker’s path is involved i.e. walking backwards on bare feet while superimposing by Tan’s ‘instructions’ for City Hall onto Orchard Road. In such scenarios, the urban walker is most free to experience the city in motion in which spaces are often acted out in the mental realm and comprise the richest forms of spatial experience and imagination. Such abstract understandings of ‘thought’ space can be understood through the following examples of ‘risks’ encountered in my performed walk (figs. 4.3.15 - 4.3.18). Such ‘risks’ may involve tripping over urban fixtures, walking into walls and/or pillars and even getting unwanted attention from the public. These represent the accidental and unplanned for aspects of the experience of the city albeit one which urban denizens usually avoid. In a way, it builds upon the preceding two representations – ‘felt’ and ‘known’ – in that it engages the body as a form of transgression. Or in other words, this is a space that people usually avoid or do not experience because they would, by the logic of good sense, avoid the purposeful act of walking into a pillar because they know that it will ultimately result in injury or embarrassment.

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<sup>77</sup> Soja, ‘Thirdspace’, Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.22.

<sup>78</sup> Soja, ‘Thirdspace’, Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.23.



Figure 4.3.15: Tripping over the edge of a pole stand. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.16: Walking into a pillar. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.17: Fear of tripping over uneven ground levels without prior notice. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)



Figure 4.3.18: Stares from the public and being perceived as a disquieting element of the normal 'flow' or 'pace' of people and things. (Source: Author's photograph 2008)

Revisiting the intentions of a third walk, this performance was conceptualized to reflect the triadic relationship that exists in both spatial production and urban experience by proposing a different kind of human geography that is embedded within ‘thought’ space. This new geography is a combination of what is materially experienced in ‘felt’ space and acultured knowledge in the ‘known’ space. Upon inspection of the ‘risks’ encountered during this walk, the ‘thought’ component can be understood as the bodily manifestations of geographical radicalism. Such ‘risks’ (manifestations) are simultaneously a conscious material experience and a metaphorical representation of urban impressions characteristic of ‘known’ geographies. Such impressions can be best understood as the instructive verbal map of Tan’s video and also the mental interpretation of Orchard Road based on my personal memory and history of the place. When these two components are engaged together during the course of my performance, they create “Other” spaces that are ‘beyond the long established boundaries of the traditional geographical imagination’<sup>79</sup> while highlighting the validity of such unprecedented happenings with the city concurrently.

During the process of the performance, I was encouraged to respond with an alternative ‘attitude’ of accepting such idiosyncrasies of the walk. And by doing so, I experienced a new side of Orchard Road – one that pays emphasis to its generative imaginations. This space is, in essence:

A space of radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle, a space of multiplicitous representations, investigatable through its binarized oppositions (compared to ‘felt’ and ‘known’ space) but also ... where there are always “other” spaces, heterotologies, paradoxical geographies to be explored.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Soja, ‘Thirdspace’, Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.24.

<sup>80</sup> Soja, ‘Thirdspace’, Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking*, p.28.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

### The City Performed (through the Body)

The three walks analyzed in this dissertation explored the connections between ‘mind and body, and motion and site, process and residue’<sup>81</sup> which result in a triadic – ‘felt’, ‘known’ and ‘thought’ – relationship of the urban experience. We recall the first ‘felt’ space as the passive sensory experience of the human foot which was illustrated in both Amanda Heng’s *Let’s Walk* and my performance *Let’s Walk the Rather Terrible of the Slaughter of the Tour Guide*. The second category of space, ‘known’ space, was solely exemplified through Tan Kai Syng’s *The Rather Terrible of the Slaughter of the Tour Guide* in which it focused namely on the mental and intellectual interpretation of City Hall. ‘Thought’ space where the urban user begins to construct new realities in human geography is evident through the ‘risks’ encountered in my performance at Orchard Road. As such, the amorphous and interconnected relationship between each space as experienced by the urban walker illuminates how a simple bodily motion – that of walking – can motivate an intricate discourse between architecture and performance art. In closing, the following quote serves to reiterate the notion of walking as a performative strategy and the walker’s body as a device for deciphering city spaces through the city:

You are walking down the street, the wind is blowing, freezing, you pull your overcoat around you and look down at the pavement, too cold to look up.

You walk down the street, the sun is warm, a light breeze fans your clothes, and you think you might see the sights today.

You are walking, then stop and look up, the skyscrapers crowd overhead and your head begins to whirl, you are not sure where you are, nor where the silent aeroplane is, going; you feel lost.

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<sup>81</sup> Horodner, *Walk Ways*, p.39.

You walk down the road, the heat is intense, you are assailed by the noise of the traffic, almost unable to hear the hawkers' demands, smells occupy your mind, you feel hungry, but do not know where to go.

.... You think about the endless ways in which you can experience the body through places, and everyday you wonder about the endless possibilities for realizing/releasing places through the body.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds), *Places through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.413-414.

## Appendix

### 1. Interview with performance-artist Amanda Heng

13 May 2008  
Telok Kurau Studio, Singapore

Author: How do you select where your performances should be done?

A: Some of the locations were selected purely for convenience's sake and also wherever possible. Some performances were performed under certain art events; so I will need to get permission for performing at such areas. For the piece 'Let's Walk with Amanda', organized by the Necessary Stage, I had to get permission or license from the management before I could perform it at the Marine Parade Hawker Center.

Author: Is there a reason why you chose Marine Parade Hawker Center as the location?

A: Yes, other than just logistics matters, I chose to perform in real spaces and specifically in a hawker center because I felt it was an iconic place. Most of our lives as Singaporeans are spent in hawker centers. It represents a very iconic space in our lives. I see the things that happen in a hawker center as a 'live' performance. I see the situation as real life.

Author: Do you think that when you are performing in a public space, your actions are a transitory alteration to the place you are performing in?

A: Yes, it does instantly. A very significant piece of work I did was the Marine Parade Hawker Center piece that I spoke about just now. It was a very simple act that I did in that space: I brought the audience from the art gallery to the hawker center and then back to the gallery. And at the hawker center, the performance begins. It involved very simple acts like laying of table cloths for the patrons – of course I get the permission from them before I do it. So, just by laying table cloths I changed the atmosphere of the space instantly. The laying of tables is an act of formality, and it is something that is not usually associated with hawker centers since they are recognized as casual spaces.

After the performance, I also laid down red canvas cloth on the roads to lead the audience back to the gallery.

So in both instances, the simple act of laying down cloths instantly changed our perception of familiar places. Someone actually told me after the performance that when she visits the hawker center now, it has a different feeling!

Another piece that I've done is called 'Walk with Stool', where I added an extra handle on my studio stool, put a dog chain on it and brought it for a walk in the outdoors. It was like bringing my pet out for a walk. I did this several times, unannounced and randomly. Many people got curious and started asking me many questions. Some even wanted to participate in the work, and so I let them carried the journey on for me. So even by taking a walk or making a journey, I can actually re-define my performing space.

Author: Is there a reason why you chose a stool?

A: It is something that I use every day; it is representation of my life as an artist. And also, I was inspired by a credit card advertisement which had a tag line that said: 'Don't leave home without it'.

Author: Can you tell me more about your work 'Let's Walk'?

A: 'Let's Walk' was performed in many different cities. I put a high-heel shoe in my mouth and with the help of a mirror, I journeyed backwards. It was performed at the old Lasalle campus at Goodman Road. In this performance, I did a very quiet act of walking. This piece was also later invited to be performed at Jakarta, Japan and Spain. Unlike in Singapore where I am familiar with the space, these places are really unknown and new to me, and so the negotiations within the spaces were really not easy.

There was also audience involvement in these performance; they were invited to walk with me. The whole idea was to show how we took walking forward for granted in our every day lives, and that by a slight change in walking, i.e. walking backwards, we see how different walking can become. Fundamentally, we still reach our destination and complete our journey, but now we have to slow down and pay attention to the things around us. And also because we were walking bare-footed, we began to realize what the ground felt like. There is pain and/or fear of walking into a drain. We

become more sensitive to such things. Every aspect of our body becomes more on guard, so to speak.

Such experiences are very personal and for audience to participate in such walks, they have to lead themselves. It is not something I can pose on the audience. I am just providing a platform that encourages them to walk for themselves; I can't speak for others.

Author: Did the different environments in Singapore, Jakarta, Japan and Spain affect the way you performed?

A: Yes, it did. It challenged my response in each new setting. When I perform at different sites, there is whole different culture involved. For example, in Jakarta, I was performing in a space where it was really congested and the route was not on proper cement ground. I had to negotiate my way through the crowd and traffic and that became a very important aspect of the journey. For Spain, it was performed just outside an Art Center. And so, I was walking on the pavement and I could warn myself from the traffic with the help of traffic lights. It was also challenging because I realized that I have become a threat to the traffic; I sometimes interrupt their way and they had to slow down for me.

The space then becomes meaningful because it allows me to react to it differently.

Author: In your walking, was your intention to revisit certain 'forgotten' spaces by walking backwards?

A: Yes. I think as Singaporeans, we are really spoilt. We expect everything to be sent to our door step and we don't even have to walk to get them. And I feel walking is a very important human activity because it stimulates blood circulation. Walking is important and we take that for granted. There are reasons for doing things slowly, even though technology gives us so much efficiency in our lives. For me I feel that things that are slow are usually taken very negatively and disregarded. So by walking backwards, I try to bring back the act of walking and ask people to just slow down. It helps me to re-discover forgotten things in life.

## 2. Interview with video-artist Tan Kai Syng

15 May 2008  
The Arts House, Singapore

Author: What is your notion of site in your artworks?

**KS:** I like the idea of how urban spaces can become media facades, so when I do my video art, I really like to capture sights in the city itself. The city then becomes the generator for my art. The art gallery also becomes a space that is not only for the ‘converted’ art audience but to all people in the urban space. Right now, I am playing with ideas that see the urban space as a ‘theme park’. When that happens, the people who are using, working or walking in the city becomes part of the art work. They are not just audience; they are part of the art. The entire thing becomes an art work. I am quite keen to explore this.

Back to your question about site, I guess it has to deal with the ‘white gallery’ space. It is quite boring, isn’t it? It is just a given thing to do. But sometimes for a ‘video’ person, it could be the best place to use because you can control the lighting, which is similar to cinematic space. Except that in a gallery, you can have multiple projections as opposed to just one in the cinema. But I’m also interested in working in spaces that not just ‘white cubes’. I have a few future works where my videos will be projected in ‘living’ spaces such as MRT stations.

Author: Is there a reason why you like to work with video as a medium?

**KS:** Video is very convenient. It can record reality quite quickly and easily and video has the ability to copy reality. That’s what my works have been looking at for the past ten years – the reality. All artworks are also a reflection of the times. And for video you can really tell which era it was captured because of the technology that was used to conceive it. So in a way, I like it because it is extremely reflective of reality. Plus, I often see myself as a tourist. Everywhere I go I’ll bring my video camera with me and capture sights for my personal archive.

Author: Who are your influences?

**KS:** Most of my works are influenced by the French New Wave guys ... probably around the same time as the Situationists. People like Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard inspire me.

Author: Do you get to select the sites in which you work in?

**KS:** Well, it depends. Sometimes I get to choose, sometimes I don't. Either way, I will just respond to it, I will not insist on a certain type of space. My works are always responsive, always pre-conceptualized for a given situation or a given space.

Author: Can you tell me more about your work 'The Rather Terrible Slaughter of the Tour Guide'? Was each audience given a hand-held monitor for this video game?

**KS:** Anyone could just go to the counter and pick up a monitor in either one of these two places: Raffles City or City Link; both are at City Hall. The conceived video game or artwork for City Link is called 'Detour' and the other for Raffles City is called 'Tour'. City Link was re-named as 'City Sink' and 'City Wink', and Raffles City as 'Baffles City' and 'Waffles City' in the two videos. And both tours are actually variations of the exact same video. So in way, I am just problematizing these terms. It is very rhetorical. It is just my way of expressing how the same thing in life can be looked at from so many different ways.

In these two videos, there are many levels of realities; what you see in the video is actually reflective of what is happening when you are walking in the tour. I like playing with blurring of boundaries between what is fiction and what is reality. And at the end of the tour, the Tour Guide dies and the audience is the murderer.

Author: How does your audience know how to walk in your art work?

**KS:** There will be prompters from the video to invite the audience to walk. For example, they will be asked to walk up to the highest building that they can see or to the underground space if they know one. At the underground, they will be introduced to characters like the 'Hobo' and 'Mc-Refugee', and when they get to the surface level, they meet new characters like 'Local' and 'Global'. I avoided clear cut instructions. So, there were people who actually didn't walk at all when they watched the video, which is okay. The walk should be totally arbitrary.

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