

# Walking in Late Capitalism

## Dialectic of Aestheticization and Commodification

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### Abstract

Walking has become a trend in the USA. In recent years, the desire to walk has brought forth specific urban design for walkable places as well as art forms that focus on walking. Whence this trend? This dissertation studies the socio-economic and cultural context that brought forth the aestheticized forms of walking such as walking in designed walkable places and walking as art. The theoretical framework to study this genealogy is based in social anthropology, critical theory, theatre studies and the practice of audio-walks. A 'dialectic of aestheticization and commodification' runs through modernity that generates aestheticized forms of walking today. While walking is initially a form of aesthetic struggle against the rational principles of modernity and the forces of capitalism, this struggle is co-opted by the logic of capital in a continuous interlacing of the processes of aestheticization and commodification. The social and spatial consequences of capitalism together with the process of aestheticization of society produce new spatial forms of capitalism, new commodified forms of social interaction, and new forms of walking. What became of the yearning for agency through walking? With 'walkable urbanism', capital returns to the city center and creates new markets for a budding walkable life-style which is fed through conspicuous consumption and the commodified 'walkable body'. With walking as art, the struggle for more physical, intellectual and political agency through walking goes on. While fighting with the self-referential loop of postmodern performing art, art walking opens up doors to new paths for contemporary art that lead out of post-dramatic art, beyond the

phenomenology of embodied experience, and out of the manipulating products of the culture industry in order to create art that offers room for imagination – the source of social change.

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# Introduction

Once we could have fun denouncing the dark, solid reality concealed behind the brilliance of appearances. But today there is allegedly no longer any solid reality to counter-pose to the reign of appearances, nor any dark reverse side to be opposed to the triumph of consumer society. Let me say at the outset: I do not intend to add my voice to this discourse. On the contrary, I would like to show that the concepts and procedures of the critical tradition are by no means obsolete. They still function very well, precisely in the discourse of those who proclaim their extinction. (Rancière 2009)

N'est-il pas réellement bien extraordinaire de voir que, depuis le temps que l'homme marche, personne ne se soit demandé pourquoi il marche, comment il marche, s'il marche, s'il peut mieux marcher, ce qu'il fait en marchant, s'il n'y aurait pas moyen d'imposer, de changer, d'analyser sa marche: questions qui tiennent à tous les systèmes philosophiques, psychologiques et politiques dont s'est occupé le monde? (de Balzac, [1833] 2011)

The inspiration for my dissertation started to develop a few weeks after I arrived in the USA. I came in the early summer of 2009 to join my partner and to live here for as long as we could and would. We lived in a small college town in the Appalachian Hills of Virginia. A beautiful place, and the Blue Ridge Mountains reminded me a lot of the Jura hills of Switzerland where I grew up. I wanted to go and hike on these hills and through the meadows following the little creeks. But I soon realized that all the land was private and there were but a few public trails made by courageous souls who were into "outdoors" and hiking. Alright, let's walk where it is allowed then, I thought, in a first hesitating acknowledgement that my understanding of public space was not a universal one, and so I would either hike the Appalachian Trail or walk on the sidewalks and streets downtown and back. Soon my bicycle arrived with the shipment of a

selection of goods from a former life in Europe. The commute to the town and the university was reduced to 10 minutes thanks to my bike, but it was also complemented with the extra thrill of riding a bike in a town where only 9 others owned a bicycle. Suddenly I would wear my helmet every day. I would yell at cars who bypassed me too closely, or throw up my arms against the planners who would let a bike lane abruptly stop with nowhere to go. I only understood later how very progressive my town was to even have the few bike lanes it had painted on the street. It was the same when I walked. I did not think of walking as a form of transportation then. I did not think of walking as an active choice or a special thing to do at all. I simply walked because a more or less efficient mixture of taking a bus, riding a bike, walking, or driving a car, was what I had been used to. But here, public or mass transit was hardly existent, driving a car seemed exaggerated for this short distance, streets and roads were not practical, walking and biking was hazardous and complicated. Car drivers did not seem to reckon with pedestrians, there were hardly any pedestrian crossings with lights on busy streets. In the winter, snow ploughs would simply fill up the sidewalks with mountains as high as myself. At night there were not enough street lanterns to illuminate the walker's path and car drivers would not see you at all, would not imagine you could actually be there walking in the first place. Strangely, people would confront me and say: "I saw you walking." But still, it was a beautiful place and I was simply drawn outside to walk anyways. I also started to feel combatant and continued to walk and bike in order to defend what represented a more respectful, human-scale and civic way of being outside, as one discovered so much more on foot than while driving in a car – even though I had to realize that the built environment and how people moved in it would not match my intentions. I began to politicize walking.

The next phase of my exploration of walking in America started with an idea coming out of these initial impressions. I wanted to discover more of my new home town and region and share it with others. From my many years spent at drama school and working in theatres all over Europe, I remembered a piece by the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff, known for her audio-walk creations, which was staged in 2005 at the theatre I then worked at, the Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin,

Germany. It was not a play, it was a video walk called *Ghost Machine* in which each member of the audience received a video camera, and on the open screen saw the path to follow while listening to a mixture of instructions, documentary story telling and fictitious story elements that all added up to an experience similar to a childhood memory of walking through the magical wardrobe into a different story but without ever totally losing real ground. The semi-fictitious work she had created offered a multi-layered journey involving all the senses, the mind, memories, imaginations, this situation, architecture, history. Following her voice, her story, walking, engaging my own story, engaging context, knowledge, perception, constantly organizing my senses and my mind to discover, interpret, question, pause, advance. The human being challenged at its best. I also remembered a piece entitled *Call Cutta* by the German documentary theatre group Rimini Protokoll, it took place at the same theatre venue. It did not happen on stage either. The audience would swarm out individually, equipped with a mobile phone and talking to a phone operator somewhere in Calcutta. The piece was an exploration of the globalized competition between low-skill workers such as call center employees. It also played on the globalization of knowledge and information, and, in my interpretation, the a-historicizing and uprooted matter-of-factness of knowledge in postmodernity through the arrangement of the walk: the Indian call center agent on the line would tell me where to walk (kind of a personified Google maps) and what the historical details and even some personal stories of the place were. The walk made me think, question, and imagine. What magnificent pieces of documentary art both pieces were, I thought back. So, I decided to create audio-walks about Blacksburg. Not with video devices, not with call agents, but with all sorts of voices from this place, this community. Audio-walks are a composition of environmental and composed sounds, voices from interviewees, a narrator and any other sound element that helps build a documentary or fiction story. In comparison to soundwalks, another notion often encountered in art walking, audio-walks are more strongly guided and rooted in dramatic or documentary practice, while, strictly speaking, soundwalks are compositions of environmental soundscapes. I wanted mine to be in the genre of creative non-fiction, a guided walk that was more inspiring

and playful than a common tourist or museum walk, but not completely fictitious either. I conceived of the walks as an archeology of the numerous layers of this place's geography, history, and culture, an invitation to dig up the various strata of human life that went through this place, and the various ways of interpreting them. Walkers would listen to the audio on their phones or mp3-players while following the path indicated and while looking, listening, perceiving. I imagined something informative but also explorative that took people outside to walk and discover that there is actually more to discover on foot than by car. With the help of generous faculty members at Virginia Tech I was able to turn this into a special study class in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, and, together with marvelous students created a set of audio-walks through Blacksburg. The audio-walks are online for anyone to take ([www.blacksburgwalks.spia.vt.edu](http://www.blacksburgwalks.spia.vt.edu)).

My doctoral studies were underway at that point and I consulted the artist-scholar on my committee as I found myself dangling between documentary art and social science. She suggested I write an exegesis of my practical work. What sounded like a theological treatise at first, was actually a practice well on its way to gain ground in the transdisciplinary realms I was getting myself into: an exegesis is the critical epistemological reflection of an art practice that allows an artist-scholar to create practice-led research, which, in turn, generates theoretical work that is inspired by and triggered by artistic practice (Barrett 2004; Barrett and Bolt 2010; Sullivan 2010). So I wrote about my work. Already during the production of the audio-walks, I began to look at walking consciously as a foreigner. Using walking for an artistic purpose somehow catapulted walking onto a more conceptual level than it had been in my immediate experience in the beginning. I was not only a foreigner doing work in her new hometown, I was an anthropologist exploring walking in a different culture. Educated in sociology and anthropology, I was happy to have found a way of combining my theoretical thinking with my making and guiding of aesthetic work, and be able to share it with others.

From that moment on, walking was not a given for granted activity anymore, I understood walking as a social practice that developed different forms in different places and times. Walking is an anthropological invariant, every culture walks, every human being has the tools to walk and at least in theory can walk (disability and other physical or cultural factors can influence this predisposition). So, my task was to explore the form(s) of walking I was discovering here. I soon understood that problematizing walking as an anthropological concept rather than a physiological or anatomical act, was a methodological imperative of my doctoral work on walking, should I gain any insights into the phenomenon I started to observe, namely that walking was actually becoming a hot topic in urban planning and design, as well as in art.

The act of writing the exegesis brought me to discover many other practice-led works. It is in the field of human, and in particular urban and cultural geography where I located most of the works that I could compare mine to. At first I was a little confused about the theoretical and artistic grounds and perspectives of these works. Many ventured into neo-phenomenological experience, others took the occasion to explore new media and had those dominate their work leaving no space for reflection or for a more professional handling of the media. While my double background or my two hearts in my chest, social science and performing arts, sometimes make me feel like a Jack of all trades and master of none, the authoritative but ignorant adventures of many of those aestheticized social scientific works or creative works made scientific irritated me not just on an epistemological level but on a political one.

I understood both art and science in their political dimension. The methods one chooses represent philosophical and ultimately political discourses which suggest a way of interpreting the world and, hence, of shaping it that way (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1968). Subjective or objective, deterministic or agency-based or a mixture of both, methodological individualism or a contextualizing approach: the question I want to ask is if there is room to think social change. And where would that change come from? It is not the illusion of individual choice and agency so often propagated by the methods favoring the individualist approach.

These theories often operate as if set in a societal vacuum. Rather, social anthropology and critical sociology of the French tradition form my tool set, from Mauss to Bourdieu and from Bachelard to Foucault, I learned to historicize phenomena, to understand them as socially constructed and, in turn, to theoretically construct them – to contribute to ways of interpreting the world which help to imagine and change it, rather than to seek empirical evidence for everyday happenings without seeing the bigger picture of society, culture and economy. In addition to these French schools of thought, my thinking is deeply inspired by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which, despite its historic tendency to fall into a gloomy world view, as many quickly say, has a hopeful drive for life in that it tests society for its wiggle room, for spaces of hope and imagination to happen. The writings of Theodor Adorno, both on society and more specifically on art and aesthetics guide my work as they urgently place every phenomenon into its socio-economic and political context and call for the theoretical mediation of the phenomena that we observe. Herbert Marcuse who continued the aesthetic quest into interpreting the late 1970s and the forces of postmodernism also informs my work. Walter Benjamin's writings, finally, are a source of inspiration for both writing about walking and for creating audio-walks, their spirit is sharp and playful at the same time, always historicizing, always seeing and creating images that tell the story: "Methode dieser Arbeit: literarische Montage. Ich habe nichts zu sagen. Nur zu zeigen."<sup>1</sup> (Benjamin, 1982, N1a,8)

All these authors contextualize social phenomena in a much larger picture than many social scientists are willing to do today. Politically and epistemologically I defend this approach, the grand narrative of capitalism and modernity is still shaping our now global societies despite postmodern declarations of their end. Therefore, I hope my work helps to contribute to think walking with this theoretical framework and to carry on the spirit of liberation and human dignity which they all fought for.

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<sup>1</sup> "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show." (Benjamin, 1999, |N1a, 8])

But it would be wrong to think of this approach as a heavy-handed Marxism, creating total theories with only one pragmatic goal in mind. On the contrary! Adorno's favoring the essay as a format of searching and suggesting knowledge shows just how close art and science can be, and just how explorative and meandering and open theorization can be. Through working closely with Benjamin's untraditional texts, as a colleague and a critic, Theodor Adorno wrote *The Essay as Form* and defended a literal open-mindedness in the creation of knowledge, while also defending epistemological rigor in the form of a critique of ideology which hides in reified worldviews in the form of stubborn short-sighted techniques and definitions of objects of inquiry.

The essay remains what it always was, the critical form par excellence; specifically, it constructs the immanent criticism of cultural artifacts, and it confronts that which such artifacts are with their concept; it is the critique of ideology. [...] If the essay is accused of lacking a standpoint and of tending toward relativism because it recognizes no standpoint lying outside of itself, then the accusation implicitly contains the conception of truth as something 'ready-made', a hierarchy of concepts, an image of truth that Hegel destroyed in his dislike of standpoints: in this the essay touches its polar opposite, the philosophy of absolute knowledge. The essay would like to cure thought of its arbitrariness by taking arbitrariness reflectively into its own procedure instead of masking it as spontaneity. (Adorno, [1958] 1984, 166)

In this spirit, I hope to have written a dissertation which reflects this search for insight into how truths are constructed, in this case how imaginaries and definitions of walking have developed, and in turn are shaping the practice of walking. At times I might stretch the form of the essay too far and require the reader's willingness to join my meandering "arbitrary" exploration of the genealogy of walking in postmodernity. I hope there are "arbitrary" paths to walk on for the reader and that the view is invigorating.

While studying transdisciplinary work that combines art and social science, it was this supposed spontaneity which Adorno describes which irritated me the most, the postmodern relativism which sold itself for creative or artistic spontaneity. So, I concluded that practice-led research is

most valuable only if there is an epistemological critique – the exegesis – because it can uncover the epistemological tropes that underlie new transdisciplinary art-science work which might not be so obvious as these works operate under the label of “new” approaches. Yet, we are all standing on the shoulders of giants when it comes to ways of knowing, in one way or the other, we use and build on cultural and scientific knowledge that is already there. And it might be worthwhile checking for possibly unwanted references that might not be as new, critical and different as the canon of arts-integrated research claims, to the extent that some say they are opposing the quantitative or the behaviorist and functionalist predominance in the social sciences (Cameron 2012; Hawkins 2013a). At this point I had only noticed a trend for involving the arts into the social sciences. Later I understood that this must be related to a general aestheticization of society. But I was formulating a critique which would later turn out to match the inner logic of what I was about to criticize: the parallel aestheticization and commodification of more and more parts of society. In my critique, the approaches in social sciences involving the arts come too close to a return to the senses and the body as in a pragmatist approach, which, if thought through, ultimately minimizes the intellectual processing of experience and values the body over the head in a way that neutralizes the body as if it were an objective cultureless tool. Using the body in this way as “measure of all things” places the body as an a-historic, objective entity, rather than as an “unfinished project, historically and geographically malleable” (Harvey, 2000, 98).

In other words, the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation.  
(Butler, 1988, 521)

Seeing the body as a fixed entity and measure of all things rules out intellectual thought and cultural content, in this way it is depoliticizing the human being, body and mind. The current trend for neuroscience is going in the same direction. Explaining everything through physiology is a way of corroborating differences in a deterministic way and leaving no place for cultural and

political struggle and change. This cannot be the goal of transdisciplinary work between the social sciences and artistic practice.

With the objectification of the world in the course of progressing demythologization, science and art have separated from each other. (Adorno, [1958] 1984, 154)

Today, academia is eagerly trying to glue them together again. Numerous scholars are trying to prove that art is profitable for research and education by measuring degrees of success in education or emotions felt when exposed to art; a quantification of art that is searching other goals than those of knowledge for humanity. 'Embodied' art practice or 'embodied' research needs a certain degree of 'epistemological vigilance' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1968; Broady 1997). In practice-led research this happens in the exegesis at the very latest, if the exegesis is not simply a report. I presented my exegesis at the American Association of Geographers Conference in 2012 where my impression was confirmed that many of the new aesthetic ways of doing research (as is currently very fashionable in human geography) are spoken about in a technical manner only, as the simple fascination of the aesthetic dimension in these approaches is taking all the attention. People were on to something, this was very encouraging. But something was missing.

By now I had problematized walking as a social phenomenon in my dissertation which I was now convinced had to be a theoretical reflection and contextualization of walking in order to show the power relations at work in the shaping of contemporary forms of walking. The audio-walks were done, the exegesis also, now I needed to theoretically study walking as a social phenomenon. With Bourdieu, I understood walking anthropologically as a social practice which took certain cultural forms and which could be altered through subjective changes in the wiggle room ('marge de manoeuvre') that offers space to wiggle, to imagine, and to change things (Bourdieu 1994; Bourdieu 2003). At home and on trips I would scan places for their interpretation of walking (and driving). Quite unfamiliar still with how urban and regional planning as well as

real estate development worked in the USA, I discovered the different kinds of city and town revitalization projects that almost all involved some sort of hope for economic (re-)development through a more pedestrian-friendly set up. They also often involved a reference to creative or aesthetic aspects, such as art galleries selling works of local painters and potters which, interestingly, looked the same everywhere. Frequently, a little museum would tell the story of the days when the trains were still running and the factory bell would call the next shift. My first thoughts turned around the question how there could be revitalization of a main street if there were no things to actually do other than shop or drink coffee or dine, as very often there were no schools, no post-office, no town hall, no offices, no library, no church left downtown as they were all located outside of the denser fabric, where there were parking lots in front of the building. I also visited newer developments or parts of cities and towns that were called “walkable” and which in one neat style imitated anachronistic bits and pieces of historical urbanity. Big brand shopping stores and restaurants for the average and upper middle class consumer lined the new streets, a plaza would be placed somewhere in the development and an eerie listlessness accompanied every single of these places I visited. Something wasn’t right; was it urban at all? What was urban? Surely, urban designers and planners must have been working on the issue of walking and were preparing sound solutions, as the interest for a pedestrian-friendly environment had been growing, I thought. So, I searched the literature and design suggestions of urban design and planning. I found many whole-hearted defenses of human-scale walkable and bikeable design. But I did not find any answers to my question of why walking took on the particular forms here of either being a culturally and practically disregarded form of locomotion or an activity that could be done in dedicated spaces only with predictable and limited possible activities associated with walking, mostly involving shopping, dining, and entertainment. I had to find the answer elsewhere, by analyzing that urban design and the life in that design, from a different discipline. I understood, suburbanization happened in connection with the proliferation of the car and so a car-centered, car-dependent landscape was generated that determines most of the few possibilities for different human-environment interactions today. The solution of

creating pockets of pedestrian-friendly developments and gradually connecting more and more of them to mass transit was one of the early ideas to change this landscape in a new movement of architects, urban designers and planners called New Urbanism (Calthorpe and Kelbaugh 1989). Rather than making that transit idea gradually happen, another wing of the New Urbanism movement developed the conceptualization and design of more or less walkable places, be they new or 'revitalized' or 'retrofitted', which could be serialized thanks to a specific design code and implemented in various places here and even abroad (Duany and Speck 2010; Duany and Plater-Zyberk 2014; Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000; Speck 2012). Today, this kind of design, rather than the transit oriented (pocket) developments, is referred to as New Urbanism. Many planning theoreticians and social scientists have criticized these designs and their copies for their Disneyesque construction of consumer enclaves, of gated communities, for the serialization of their design and for many other factors that contribute to an urban fabric that is determined by money and spectacle while faking a picturesque village of yesteryear, a fabric determined by bad architecture which serves an imaginary of an unreal society (Falconer Al-Hindi & Till, 2001; Hirt, 2009; Knox, 2010, to name but a few). Numerous planning scholars, though, favor this approach for it is a step towards making America more walkable, more sustainable, they argue. The planning scholar Emily Talen has written extensively about this (Talen 2005; Duany and Talen 2014). Here is her conclusion of a review of Paul Knox's critique of New Urbanism in *Cities and Design*. If nothing else, it shows the apparent epistemological incompatibility of a predominant approach in urban design and planning with a larger social critique:

Why, then, is it necessary to engage in the constant berating of designers throughout the book as 'manipulators of aesthetics' whose role is often reduced to the perpetuation of a corrupt system? Why does this book seem to lump together the high priests of modernist design—Le Corbusier and other 'branders'—with urban planners and designers trying to create livable communities? Why is 'tradition' always viewed as 'sentimental'? Why does this book seem to take the angle that every designer-generated attempt to humanize

places, if it involves a three-dimensional master plan on paper, is phony? (Talen, 2013, 242)

Clearly, I had to go and find my answers in a different discipline, yet needed to study urban design and planning's discourse to understand the underlying logic. Another sector of urban design and planning scholarship follows a different kind of practicality. Transportation planning and traffic engineering, although often criticizing each other, ultimately work hand in hand in a similar logic of measuring transportation flows and trying to increase mobility through increased speed of getting somewhere, or, more recently, through what is termed access (Grengs et al. 2010). Transportation behavior is measured and categorized in order to help understand individual traffic choices (Cervero, 2002; Lee & Vernez Moudon, 2006; Levine, 2006; Rodríguez, Levine, Weinstein Agrawal, & Song, 2011; Zahran, D., Maghelal, Prelog, & Lacy, 2008 and many more). While it is very informative to measure the quantity of people using different transportation modes, these approaches give little insight into the reasons for these choices. Although many set out to define just that, their focus on individual choices ignores the larger cultural context which might shed some more light on the culture of walking. Some scholars study if the built environment has anything to do with transportation choices, but again, they remain in a behaviorist model which ignores the cultural context of urban fabric (Cervero 2002; Rodriguez and Joo 2004; Degen and Rose 2012). Noticing that no satisfying answers are found, their behaviorist model pushes them to ask what kind of emotions are felt when facing certain architecture, some are even spilling over into happiness studies and other one-dimensional reasoning. One author, in a strive for regulation of urban design and bringing in neuroscience posits: "Boring cityscapes increase sadness, addiction and disease-related stress. Is urban design a matter of public health?" (Ellard 2015) Certainly, what has been termed the 'architecture of fear' is an important factor in American architecture and urbanism (Ellin 1997), but it needs to be understood in its broader social and specifically political context. A sociological approach to architecture and design might help shed some light on such questions of the interaction between space and people. And it would, above all, bring in the political

dimension of the social order of space, rather than distracting from those issues by focusing on the psychological, emotional or the individual preferences of people. If and why, where and when people walk needs to be understood sociologically as well, as walking is a social practice through which social distinction is reproduced and identity is performed. Quantitative and psychological approaches alone are insufficient. Again, it is a problem of the predominant methodological individualism. Some scholars are closer to an understanding of urban design as being of a greater social and cultural pattern when they argue that it would be necessary to roll out broad education programs to change the culture and imaginaries around walking (Southworth 2005).

On a different but parallel level, Christopher Leinberger, a developer and consultant, started making the case for a “New American Dream” and advocated for walkable urbanism in and outside of urban design and planning scholarship in an attempt to generalize the notion of walkability (Leinberger 2009; Leinberger and Alfonzo 2012; Leinberger 2012). He co-sponsored the WalkScore App which tells people how walkable an address is by calculating it with a walkability algorithm. Since its start a couple of years ago, WalkScore’s site and app have been connected with real estate offers and are now more of a real estate search engine with walkability indicator. Walkability, it appears, is highly desired and even generates a “walkability premium”, the additional price people are willing to pay for the attribute of high walkability (Pivo and Fisher 2011). This is great, a success, one could argue, the task of making America more pedestrian friendly is in good hands. There is specific design for this, there is a walkability indicator, there is slowly even a lifestyle developing that feeds on the images and imaginaries of walkable urbanism: the New American Dream. All is neat and tidy. Indeed, what’s not to like?

[It] is not only perfectly rational but also perfectly reasonable. All protest is senseless, and the individual who would insist on his freedom of action would become a crank. (Marcuse, 1941, 143)

Marcuse's comment was written in a study about the social implications of technology in modernity. This particular excerpt is part of a reflection about the highway and its signs for sites and exits and picnic spaces which predefine and organize landscape for the new generation of motorized people. My study is not about tastes and preferences of neighborhoods and transportation modes. In Marcuse's spirit, it is about the social and spatial consequences of capitalism. After observing the buy-in of the real estate industry into walkable urbanism and the question of walkability, suddenly it was clear: walkable urbanism is another spatial fix (David Harvey 2001). It is capital searching for new markets and thereby altering the landscape. It is the restless urban landscape (Knox 1991; Knox 1993) which returns its focus to the city center – be it the original center or the newly constructed developments with a plaza or square representing a center, or even the revitalized main street of a town. The 'walkability fix' not only alters the landscape but also has social consequences. And the further commodification is pushing into the social fabric, the bigger these consequences are. Conceptually, this contemporary form of the society of the spectacle corroborates the commodified aestheticization or the aesthetic commodification of spheres of society which had not been thoroughly commodified by capitalism yet. Capitalism's return to the city – through walkable urbanism – opens up new markets for capital and brings with it deep changes in the social fabric of civil interaction. A Starbucks app allows customers to order and pay coffee before even stepping into the coffee shop. Civic rules of cohabitation – in this case forming lines on the basis of arrival – are bought out by financial and technological access. Private drivers can transform their car into a cab and back and do a side job as need be through *Uber*, another service that functions via a smartphone app. Homeowners can rent out their room on *airbnb*. Parts of private life are now made profitable. This is capitalism's flexibility credo gone private. These are some of the social consequences of capitalism.

In contrast, much of the scholarly and journalistic discourse on walkable urbanism is based upon the premise of an individual demand for walkable places, and an individual choice of buying real estate or frequenting places with so called high walkability. There are smart phone

apps that help find such pre-defined places in a breeze. While indeed individuals do make these choices – and the saying “voting with their feet” comes to my mind – they do so based on larger social developments, as opposed to the methodological individualism that refers back to the idea of rational individual choices made independently and more or less disconnected from the social context. These social dynamics are so integrated in our one-dimensional understanding of society that they go unnoticed. It is my goal in this dissertation to suggest a theoretical framework that problematizes these dynamics.

When I use ‘social context’, the term social stands for various dimensions that together form the society we live in: economic, religious, cultural... dimensions. In my approach I consider the economic dimension (the mode of production) as dialectically related to subjective agency. This is different from a “scientific” or orthodox Marxist approach that considers the mode of production to more or less fully determine the course of society. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological-anthropological approach is very helpful in understanding the society/individual relation as a dynamic rapport of power relations in which the subjective (individuals, groups) has a certain wiggle room to bring on change to the objective (social structures and institutions), rather than being fully subject to the determining force of the objective conditions, or, on the contrary, be a freestanding particle (Bourdieu 1994). Bourdieu’s approach is a structural constructivism or a constructive structuralism. It encompasses both (often divided) epistemological sides, constructivism’s focus on the mind’s construction of knowledge and things on the one hand, and on the other hand, structuralism’s determination of one’s actions by given social structures. This is an important difference both to deterministic approaches and to the behaviorist methods that dominate the studies on walkability and walkable urbanism today. Indeed, the reference to behaviorism in urban and regional planning studies that are on the forefront of the walkability discourse build a simplistic model of human action. Rather, I suggest to use an approach that considers both human agency and social context to study the phenomenon of walkable urbanism.

In the case of walkable urbanism, then, one necessary approach takes the form of a sociology of architecture (Delitz 2009), or, to stay closer to Bourdieu, a social anthropology of architecture. Here, architecture is considered a material reflection of culture. Buildings with their specific form and materials, with their specific way of sitting in the landscape and of creating a built environment reflect a society's order of things, that is, how it organizes people in space. Geographic space, then, is social space. It is not a container space. It is a dynamic space in which people and the built environment interact. Just as people create the built environment out of a historical context, once built, in turn, the built environment influences agents in their movement and behavior. Architecture encompasses the living spaces created by architects (and, indeed, mostly by planners and developers, I learned) inside and outside of particular buildings. It also encompasses the living spaces created through the aggregation of several buildings and constructed spaces. The kind of living spaces that are built reflect the culture, the economy, the history, the social context(s) out of which they were generated. They reflect the dominant ideas of how people are arranged in space and how people are supposed to move in space and what to do there. Architecture and people spatially reflect the dynamic social order. Some architecture is more directive than other. Despite the relative fixedness of buildings it is a dynamic social order since the agent's actions co-determine the use of space and the social order that is ever changing. In geography, Edward Soja described this dialectical relationship between space and people as socio-spatial dialectic (Soja 1980). And he added a third dimension later in his writings, the historical one, to emphasize the importance of the social context that reflects the ideas and the power relations at work at a given time and place (Soja 2010). Altogether, this is what Bourdieu has been suggesting with the various 'fields' of society, and how they influence each other depending on the power relations at a given time and in a given space and with a certain genealogy.

These methodological choices allow me to analyze walking and walkable urbanism as a social phenomenon with socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Yet, to continue my study and fully understand the dynamics at work which led to the phenomenon of walkable urbanism and

which will contribute to develop walking in certain ways rather than in others, I needed to add another theoretical dimension. Maybe that dimension would also help finding the wiggle room for social change, the leverage to re-appropriate walking from the society of spectacle and develop social, geographical and political agency: So far I had understood that walking needs to be problematized as a social phenomenon if I wanted to analyze the contemporary form I observed in the USA. I had found the methodological tools therefore in social anthropology. But I was also wondering why the apparent increase in the interest for walking in America found its response in restrictive and commercial spaces such as the ones summarized under the notion of walkable urbanism, that is urban design and planning for walkable places in urban settings (in a spirit of returning to the city from the suburb). My hypothesis at that point was that walking was a genuine yearning generated through the accumulated frustrations with the rationality of modernity and capitalism, and that in order to keep this little rebellion at bay, power (in Foucault's sense of capillary power) had to find ways of recuperating it, and so it co-opted the desire to walk and integrated it into a new market and into new spaces: walkable urbanism. Of course, this is not an active step done by "evil capitalists", rather it is capitalism's inherent drive towards marketizing sectors of society which together with technology and cultural parameters are ready for or at least prone to it. Hence, in order to answer the question of how walking became this restricted, commodified form, despite the desire for more agency and a kind of creativity through walking, I needed to add a deeper theoretical layer to my study. It needed to combine the mechanisms and social effects of capitalism with a more subjective dimension which would explain the surge of postmodern 'yearnings' (Ellin 1999) to which I counted the desire to walk and the general desire for creativity. The yearning for walking appeared to me as part of a larger phenomenon of a hype of creativity that I observed, a return of making, a yearning for a return of individual production after a long phase of mass consumption, maybe a nostalgic analogue twitch in times of technological assistance and virtual realities, in any case, an increased publicity of the topic of creativity, which appeared also in the phenomenon of arts-led revitalization, often combining the experience (or consumption) of creativity with walking in a

designated walkable arts district. The more I thought of it, the more I started problematizing the yearning for walking as part of a general aestheticization of society. The growing interest in aesthetic techniques in the social sciences described earlier also bore that sign. The involvement of art into revitalization projects and into declaring 'creative cities' was another one. I found a problematisation of this phenomenon made by a Bourdieusian sociologist (Reckwitz 2012a). Reckwitz focuses his theory of the aestheticization of society very much on the evolving desires and struggles of a cultural subject which gets its ideas of resistance from the aesthetic field but through the course of modernity spreads it into all aspects of society. Starting in Romanticism and passing through organized Modernity up to Postmodernity, this aesthetic subject seeks an alternative to the modern, capitalist society in the aesthetic. From romantic poetry to dada to counter culture, the growing and changing aesthetic subject seeks to transgress the constricting principles of reason and efficiency of modernity. It is a constant struggle against the rationalization and commodification through capitalism. So, maybe the form of walking I observed in the spaces of walkable urbanism came out of a bigger cultural process. Indeed, in trying to elaborate its characteristics I concluded that walking in walkable urbanism was an aestheticized form of walking, a form that was somehow detached from geographically and physically aware movement and at the same time very much in correspondence with the images and imaginaries conveyed through the architecture of spectacle of walkable urbanism. In order to understand walking today in its larger genealogy, I needed to problematize walking more dialectically, more historically, and in the spirit of the agency-seeking approaches I had chosen to work with. It was at this point that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School was not simply my preferred critical approach underlying much of my thought anymore, but I realized that I needed to work more specifically with its dialectical and theoretically mediated understanding of social phenomena. And so I put the process of aestheticization of society in a dialectical relation to the process of commodification of society, which is inherent to capitalism.

Both the social anthropology of Bourdieu and the critical theory of Adorno, Marcuse and Benjamin share the emphasis on the historicity of social phenomena. Critical theory, in

particular, helps me ground the phenomenon of contemporary walking in a larger context and process of enlightenment, modernity and capitalism moving forward. I am thus asking what the genealogy of contemporary imaginaries and practices of walking is. Critical theory suggests to analyze a phenomenon not only in its materialism, its factual existence, but also and especially in its socially mediated form. Otherwise, social phenomena are depoliticized. In Adorno's words:

The exclusion of theory confirms the empirical. It gives it a delusively epic character on the one hand, and on the other deprives phenomena, as mere objects of subjective experience, of their true historico-philosophical weight. (T. W. Adorno & Benjamin, 2003, 102)

It is a methodological choice which allows the subject or the subjective to have more weight in the social relations of power without falling into the social vacuum of behaviorism. This is hoped to be possible mostly through reason – the belief in the original focus of Enlightenment. Of course, critical theory also shows how the principles of Enlightenment took a path in modernity which transformed the myths of the feudal and religious middle ages into new myths of a more rational, efficient and capitalist society with a contorted version of reason serving these myths (Horkheimer & Adorno, [1944] 2002). But there is hope in this approach. Not only reason can be the light bearer in the darkness of myths among the glittery reality of the culture industry which developed in parallel to capitalism. Art offers space for reflection and imagination. Adorno and Marcuse believed strongly in the force of art. There is light coming through the cracks of the spaces that art can provide. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno does not mean the products of the culture industry when he discusses art, the culture industry's goal being to efface the 'non-identical' and to blend everything into a well recognizable medley which confirms the dominant values (T. W. Adorno 1997).

The culture industry is the societal realization of the defeat of reflection; it is the realization of subsumptive reason, the unification of the many under the one. (Bernstein, 1991, 11)

The culture industry operates a suave repression, as Adorno argues, to keep any rebellion at bay and to give people just the right amount of entertainment and satisfaction of individual needs that their exploitation can continue smoothly and, somehow, pleasantly (T. W. Adorno 1991a). My argument around walkable urbanism builds on this theory in that I see walkable urbanism as an element of the culture industry, adding to the images and imaginaries of consumption with its emphasis on commodified enjoyment and distraction, the culture industry serves capitalism's need to expand its markets into new spheres. Guy Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle states that "[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images." (Debord, [1967] 2004, 7) This led me to explore how the process of aestheticization worked through the increase of our visual culture, through the prolific use of images and decorative design which even transformed already iconic and aesthetic disciplines such as architecture and urban design or the performing arts. I study the example of Venturi's 'instant archeology' developed in *Learning from Las Vegas* (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1988). I argue that the importance of the visual and the instant character of field work comes at the cost of a certain methodological vigilance that also influences the social sciences which are experimenting with the visual arts and with instant ethnographies. The general aestheticization also flowed into the rest of academia, bringing with it discourses of creativity, 'design-thinking' and arts-integrated research and education, which might seem like a trait of the rebellion against standardized learning, but which really is simply adapting the education of the future labor force for the 'creative economy'. Again, I saw an aesthetic push against modern principles that were reappropriated by the needs of capital. And in this example the power relations were already such that capitalism had more leverage. A more holistic education might be the noble intent of the aesthetic subject, but the real driver is capitalism which has recuperated the aesthetic dimension. These thoughts, the inter-dependency of socio-aesthetic and economic forces, triggered the conceptualization of a dialectical movement that was starting to take shape in my head.

The increased interest in walking and the response given in the form of walkable urbanism took place in parallel to other expressions of rebellion through the aesthetic. They all had to do with the larger genealogy of people's struggle with the principles of modernity and capitalism. I was now able to problematize what I observed as a result of a dialectical movement of a process of aestheticization and a process of commodification which ran through modernity, and which, today, in postmodernity or late capitalism culminated in an entanglement of the aesthetic and the commercial such that the original struggle is hard to recognize if not totally co-opted by the needs of capital. The aesthetic is now serving the commodification of every nook and cranny of society. So, the question opened up, where the wiggle room for imagination and change would be. Adorno and Marcuse's hope was in art. My audio-walk work had left me with a tingling sensation of a way out of postmodern self-referential art that only affirms the logic of late capitalism (Bernstein 1991a; Stegemann 2009; Lehmann 2006; Marcuse 1972). I wanted to stay with the idea that the increase in the desire for walking is related to an aesthetic – aesthetic as in aisthesis, referring to the senses – expression of the struggle for more agency. With the necessary epistemological vigilance walking might really be a door to liberation; through walking, a physical, spatial and ideally intellectual relative autonomy might be gained because walking so clearly stands on the intersection of the subjective (the self) and the objective (society and its environment). Bringing one's body into movement is a subjective step, but the way one does this and in what environment for what purpose is completely societal. The awareness of these objective factors strengthen the subjective awareness of factual and cultural constraints. Walking, if understood as this reflective practice between the subjective and the objective could indeed be spiritually meditative (as it has been practiced for centuries) or even politically illuminating in an otherwise one-dimensional world. This is a lot of expectation put on the simple act of walking! There is, in fact, a large community of artists who walk as an artistic practice or make the act of walking the art itself and who refer to walking as liberating in one sense or the other. Those who venture into psychogeography quote the Situationists' 'dérive' (Debord 1956). Others refer to deCerteau's tactical walks through the city (De Certeau 1980). Almost all of them

mention Benjamin's flâneur as a free and timeless walker of the city, which, as you can read later on, I consider mistaken, as the flâneur already has incorporated not only the process of aestheticization but specifically the process of commodification (Benjamin 2003; Buck-Morss 1986). Walking artists often refer to Thoreau and his praise and recommendations of walking. But Thoreau's understanding of walking was embedded in a pragmatist approach and put too much emphasis on the quasi objective position of the body, the senses and natural nature, as well as the thoughts coming from the experience of walking in nature. Rebecca Solnit, in her history of walking points to the problematic relation of nature and culture so often ignored in walking (and other discourses involving the environment):

The taste for nature already entrenched in Thoreau's time and magnified in our own has a peculiar history, one that has made nature itself cultural. (Solnit, 2000, 85)

Considering all the problematisation of walking done so far, if I wanted to leverage the potential of walking and work towards a liberating form of walking, it might be necessary to move towards artistic practice again, where I had started this project. When almost everything is superficially aestheticized and thoroughly commodified, when even art has become part of the society of spectacle where the image is predominant over content, where art already gives the answers to everything by affirming and confirming the status quo in manipulative dramaturgies rather than offering undefined space for imagination, then it is urgent to reclaim that space and aspire to aesthetic forms which bring back the "mature"<sup>2</sup> audience. It is with a focus on the space for imagination offered by art that I had to study walking as a form of art, and in a later step (beyond this dissertation) would actually create walking art (audio-walks) with these thoughts in mind.

Today, any production that has some kind of entertainment or decorative value is called art. But art that provides us with room for interpretation and which allows us to "roam freely in

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<sup>2</sup> I am referring to Adorno's term "mündig" which proves terribly difficult to translate into English. Mature, obviously is not meant in the common media use meaning over 21 years of age and of a particular genre, but rather, "mature" in the sense of educated and relatively autonomous in thinking and acting. The title of the radio interviews collected in *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* was translated as *Education to Maturity*.

imagination” (Horkheimer & Adorno, [1944] 2002, 100), that is work that also allows us to peak through the cracks of history, the cracks of myths and glitz and social order and see not only what we don’t like but also have insights and imagine other possibilities of life on the subjective, personal as well as the objective, societal level. I analyze walking as art from this perspective with the prospect of developing an ‘aesthetic form’ that is both a product of today and a door-opener to see those cracks, a work that allows the audience to do an immanent critique of society, at the same time within and critically outside of it, an artistic practice that brings back the art of sublimation (Marcuse 1978).

Adorno’s aesthetic theory, here, guides my analysis of walking as art, and of audio-walks in particular, as his theory allows me to keep the focus on finding a way out of the current self-referential logic of postmodern performing arts. Walking art has not been placed into an art historical genre yet, different formats are associated with existing genres such as visual art, performance, site-specific theatre, transdisciplinary art. For this study, I categorize walking art in the performing arts, to a certain extent because I come from theatre and look at site-specific art from a theatrical, performative point of view, and also because theatre studies offer theories to analyze postmodern and so called post-dramatic forms of performing art that are highly insightful for walking as art. I especially mention two German theatre scholars whose writings analyze theatre and performance in its context of postmodernity – exactly what I set out to do. From there I develop an analysis of walking art and audio-walks that also allows me to understand this format in its contextual genealogy.

There is not only audio-walking, there are numerous forms of walking that are practiced by artists, and in a first step I relate various forms of walking art to postmodern trends in the social and human sciences. I discuss the social turn, the focus on the everyday, aestheticization, and autobiography or autotopography and their relation to walking art. It was important checking to what extent walking art forms are postmodern aestheticizations of an everyday practice – walking – or, indeed, if there was among them a more rebellious or artistic (in the sense of

providing room for imagination and reflection) form of walking as art. I discovered that there is of course a very postmodern aspect to all of those walking art forms. The very fact of positing walking, this everyday action, as art, is inherently postmodern. But walking is also part and parcel of every kind of performing art. The artists sets foot on the stage, on the site, and into the work, the dancer's basic tool is a step. To elicit the curious and attentive, the imaginative and rebellious dimension of walking in these works or in future aesthetic forms of walking as art became my goal.

A discussion on postmodern and what has been termed 'post-dramatic theatre' forms the theoretical starting position (Lehmann 2006): art in postmodernity has become affirmative, in other words: bighting its tale. It mirrors the fragmentation of postmodernism and the logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1984). It has become part of the society of spectacle, intrinsically entwined in the process of aestheticization, which, as we've seen, is entwined with the process of commodification. Aestheticized art, by that I mean art which refers to trendy imagery more than to content. Art is on the market, that is true not only for valuable paintings. The logic of the market in combination with aestheticization creates ever same crowd pleasers, even in remote fringe theatre festivals with smaller local crowds. The aesthetics are generalized.

Exclusively going back to classic pieces of art is not a satisfying option; new art needs to be produced. Somehow, a new aesthetic form needs to be working with the postmodern and at the same time stand outside of it, Adorno's immanent critique. Audio-walks, I figured, carried the potential to offer this tension if they were conceived not simply as narrator-guided linear story and path, but rather with a dramatic tension between fiction and reality that allows the walker-audience to start its imaginative engine and ponder on the multiple possibilities that existed between fiction and reality, on a different view of reality or question reality as presented all together. As in theatre, it is through the dramatic distance, the dramatic tension that reality can be reflected upon. Only through this tension can spaces open up which the audience can fill with its own interpretations, compared to the entertaining works of the culture industry where every

emotion, every interpretation, every value set is given to the audience with no option of interpreting it differently. That prescription is already in the script and will be emphasized musically. Certainly, one is very entertained during a show of the culture industry – and I am not only referring to Broadway – but the spirit becomes rather empty, filled with entertaining details, distracted, ultimately bored, because when it stops, you need more of the same. Dramatic tension, however, the thrill of the difference between fiction and reality, personas and persons, keeps the spirit alive and curious. The aesthetic form to develop, I conclude, is an audio-walk that combines fiction with documentary, guided paths with open space, in the hope of offering space for imagination.

## Structure

My dissertation has two parts, one deals with walking in walkable urban design, and the other deals with walking in the field of art.

Part I is structured as follows: Exploring the social and spatial consequences of capitalism, I will start with introducing walkable urbanism as a spatial form of capitalism which I suggest to call the ‘walkability fix’ and look at some of the societal effects of capital’s return to the city. Then, I will problematize the appearance of walkable urbanism as the result of a dialectical movement between a process of aestheticization and a process of commodification, leading to an intensification of the society of spectacle in which walkable urbanism represents a perfect place of spectacle. Finally, I ask what kind of body the walkability fix needs. Therefore I suggest to problematize the concepts of space and body as socially constructed and to understand them in the context of the above-mentioned dialectic of aestheticization and commodification which brings forth the ‘walkable body’, not a walking but a walkable commodity-body.

Part II is structured like this: First I present the context and source of contemporary art walking and give some examples of walking art works and how they relate to their postmodern context, thereby looking at the challenges this postmodern context poses to the artistic and critical potential of walking art. Second, I explore soundwalks from the point of view of theatre studies. I thereby suggest soundwalks as a new aesthetic form capable of both working with postmodern theatrical means and of overcoming their challenges, thereby offering a contemporary aesthetic experience that combines critique (critical theory: negativity) and a glimpse of hopeful reconciliation.

# PART 1

## Walkable Urbanism: Spatial Fix and Life-Style

Dreams are now a shortcut to banality.

(Benjamin, 1999b)

Much has been written on the wastefulness of the sprawling built environment. Suggestions on how to fix this through a change in transportation preferences and through building new walkable spaces equally abound. These are suggestions for a different built environment, for a different living space (Lebensraum). Despite the interest in creating room for society to happen, most reflections ignore the fact that society also happens through these spaces, and that these spaces are made through society. Hence, I suggest to approach the contemporary phenomenon of walkable urbanism from a socio-anthropological and critical theory inspired angle in an attempt to understand its genealogy, and to include the socio-spatial dialectic between architecture and urban design on the one hand and society and people on the other hand. My guiding question has therefore not primarily been “What is walkable urbanism?” but rather “What is the cultural context that brings forth walkable urbanism?” Further, on the basis of walkable urbanism I explore contemporary socio-spatial consequences of capitalism. How did this spatial form of capitalism come into being and what are its implications on society as a whole? What are some of the transformations of urban cohabitation that happen when capital returns to the city with walkable urbanism? How does commodification affect the body in its course of colonizing these spaces for the sake of creating new markets? And ultimately, what kind of body does this spatial form of capitalism need? The desire to walk and to create

walkable spaces is a rebellion against the car-centered landscape and built environment. It is deeply rooted in a longstanding aesthetic rebellion against the rationality of modernism and the alienating forces of capitalism. But as, I will show, this rebellion is co-opted and used to feed the new markets found in the city as the aestheticization process and the commodification process are closely interlacing in postmodernity. Even the agonizing suburban fabric hosts new markets as walkable urbanism spreads through the serialization of its design and function and as the walkability fix becomes not only a landscape but, and primarily, a life-style the hungry postmodern subject is prone to buy in to.

I make five hypotheses on walkable urbanism around which my dissertation evolves:

1. Walkable urbanism is more than a new form of transportation planning and design, it is a product of postmodernity in its economic, spatial, and cultural dimensions and therefore needs to be understood as a social phenomenon. This builds on an understanding of walking as more than a form of human locomotion, I suggest to problematize walking as a social phenomenon, the forms of which are subject to social change.
2. The mechanism under walkable urbanism's imaginary of a liberating movement for more agency and better living (healthier, more sustainable, interactive, civic) is capitalism's quest for new markets: Walkable urbanism is a contemporary spatial form of capitalism, walkable urbanism's design in its codified and serial character corroborates the commodified relation between built environment and capitalism.
3. Capitalism's return to the city and the urban, together with the context of postmodernity has structural implications on society as a whole: the commodification/marketization of deep, previously untouched and almost pre-capitalist civic layers of urban life, the serialization/standardization of urban design and architecture, as well as new forms of social distinction and corroboration of hierarchies.

4. The strong focus on the visual and on (decorative) design in our society has developed out of the inherently modern movement of aestheticization (essentially a rebellion that became a combination of the pressure from continuous creative innovation for progress, the culture industry and the pursuit of happiness). This trend, together with technological inventions has created a huge production of images and spectacle which are the carriers of social imaginaries. Walkable urbanism has a highly designed (in the sense of codified) architecture, alludes to an aestheticized life-style (from bohemian references, to walking and to biking outfits, to coffee shop-branded reusable coffee cups), and narrowly defines the social usage of the built environment as consumptive behavior in the service of reproducing the images and imaginaries of a walkable life-style, which, in turn, feeds the new urban markets.

5. Walkable urbanism brings forth the 'walkable body'. The relation between (social) body and (social) space reflects the encompassing context which brought forth walkable urbanism in the first place: the walkable body is a concentrate of postmodernity's yearning for human-scale physical and intellectual autonomy (more agency) vs. the commodification of everything which restricts this autonomy.

Exploring the social and spatial consequences of capitalism, I will first describe walkable urbanism as a spatial form of capitalism which I suggest to call the 'walkability fix' and look at some of the societal effects of capital's return to the city. Second, I will problematize the appearance of walkable urbanism as the result of a dialectical movement between a process of aestheticization and a process of commodification, leading to an intensification of the society of spectacle in which walkable urbanism represents a perfect place of spectacle. Third, I ask what kind of body the walkability fix needs. Therefore I suggest to problematize the concepts of space and body as socially constructed and to understand them in the context of the above-mentioned dialectic of aestheticization and commodification which brings forth the 'walkable body', not a walking but a walkable commodity-body.

## The Pursuit of Walkable Happiness or The Walkability Fix

The American Dream of social mobility and homeownership is being superseded by a New American Dream, declares walkability expert Christopher Leinberger, and the new dream is walkable urbanism (Leinberger 2009). Indeed, the new trend has stirred up the real estate market that shows a tendency for walkable neighborhoods to be more expensive than others, because of their walkability. It appears, there are some real implications to the Dream, and Walter Benjamin reminded us of having to wake up from the dream state capitalism has put everyone in. The Pursuit of Happiness was inscribed in the U.S. Declaration of Independence as a right for everyone. It has almost become a duty, and certainly part of the dream state. Barbara Ehrenreich uncovers the imaginaries of happiness and positive thinking that depoliticize social phenomena and put them back exclusively on the shoulders of individuals by stimulating a sense of failure to be happy and successful rather than understanding the socio-economic relations at work when things go wrong (Ehrenreich 2009). So, people are unhappy with the suburban landscapes and lives? Let's find them a new life-style that promises happiness and continues the dream. The dream, that is a false consciousness as part and parcel of alienation, generated through the capitalist mode of production and through the suave repression in a happiness-promising entertainment society. The culture industry satisfies just as much as is needed to keep people at bay, and to keep capitalism running. The new developments for pedestrian friendly life-styles will keep entertainment up and the pursuit of happiness going while at the same time offering capitalism new profitable markets. The urban landscape still is restless, it is ever changing (Knox 1993). And it changes in a way that keeps everyone happy and dreaming. The dialects between the needs of capitalism and the yearnings of people create new landscapes and spatial forms, not without consequences for society.

Walkable urbanism (the notion encompassing both architectural and cultural dimensions) is an expression of capitalism's continuous quest for new markets. Leaning on David Harvey's notion of 'spatial fix' (David Harvey 2001) and the idea that capital continuously searches new markets

and is in a constant state of adaptation bringing forth temporary but consequential 'fixes', I suggest that walkable urbanism is another spatial fix, the 'walkability fix'. This quest and the solutions applied have consequences for the landscape, the result is the 'spatial form of capitalism'. While the suburb was the spatial form of capitalism during much of the twentieth century, today we observe a return to the city. City centers are 'revitalized'. Main Streets all over America are revitalized. Urban infill is constructed. New kinds of buildings and developments appear, new ones and revitalized ones; condos, town houses, loft apartments, entire communities or 'villages' in the city or the very close suburban ring and also in towns that urbanize. This re-urbanization is inspired by European dense city life and finds its US-American adaptation following key words such as walkability and sustainability. Innovation districts are declared special zoning allows for different mixed-use to happen that combines home, work, and leisure/entertainment time. Art districts are introduced to attract artists with the idea of having them revitalize abandoned buildings and create a bohemian buzz at the same time that in turn attracts tourists and potential residents and businesses to return to the city. The young and trendy move out of their parents' suburban home and into to the city for a walkable life-style. Retirees move to the city to be more mobile (walking!) and socially connected compared to the suburb. Forbes<sup>3</sup> even suggests to pre-retire in a city: "Move there now, retire there later." Businesses are moving back to the city, job opportunities grow, new kinds of shops and restaurants appear. Suburban big box stores open smaller city versions such as City Target and Target Express, Wal-Mart Express or Tesco Express.

The image of the quality of life in the city is definitely changing into this positive image of a buzzing place of entertainment, al-fresco dining and constant interaction; the image of the suburb, in turn, is crumbling for many. Several decades of critique have pointed out the limits of suburban life such as the wastefulness of the suburban construction, the disappointed dream of

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<sup>3</sup> Forbes Magazine online: "Move there now, retire later." [forbes.com/pictures/fgmi45fjil/move-there-now-retire-there-later/](http://forbes.com/pictures/fgmi45fjil/move-there-now-retire-there-later/) accessed 8/31/2015

the bucolic suburb, the corroboration of the patriarchal system as Betty Friedan famously described in the 1960s (Friedan 1963), the one-dimensionality of life with pseudo-choices of life-style, the competition with the Joneses, the absence of outdoor play spaces for children, and the numbing effect of commuting by car. Against these short fallings, moving back to the city appears as a liberating step. An educated choice for whomever can afford it.

Walkable urbanism conveys an alleged agency. The car is the prolongation of capitalism's arm in times of suburbanization. Building the suburbs inscribed capitalism into the landscape. The car-centered, low-density suburb became capitalism's vast spatial form. The image of the American city center from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on was that of crime and disorder, and that image contributed to further suburbanization (Beauregard 2006). The suburban landscape was initially started with tramways fingering out from the city business center, followed by trains. Later the 'railroad suburb' was replaced by the car and its highways to access the further and further outward reaching suburbs. Today, suburbia is criticized for its wastefulness, its solitude, and for the irritating commutes it holds for its inhabitants. Suburbia is a crumbling spatial fix with lasting effects on the landscape that are costly. Capital has to find new profitable markets. And people want a different life-style that has more human scale dimensions with time and space being manageable without having to spend that much time in the car. A rebellion against capitalist space and its restricted life-styles, away from the outdated styles of suburbia and back into the zero tolerance city where an aestheticized and commodified life-style is at the tip of your cell phone.

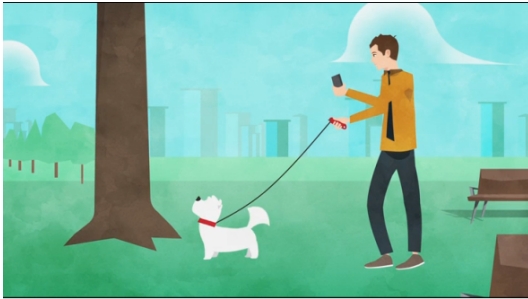
The urban design and life style associated with walkable urbanism come out of a dialectical movement between the aestheticization process and capital's search for new markets. I will elaborate this dialectical movement later. For now, simply keep it in mind as this double movement of aestheticization and commodification unfolding throughout modernity and into postmodernity or late capitalism bringing forth specific subjects. The desire to walk is a characteristic of the postmodern aesthetic subject. It is also a reaction to the car-centered

sprawling spatial form of capitalism in the post—WWII decades. The result, walkable urbanism, as well, is a result of the ongoing aestheticization and the conjunctures of capitalism to the extent that walkable urbanism creates places of spectacle and socially performative walking. This is a style of walking which feeds social distinction through the identity-building life-styles adopted. Building life-styles is a deeply postmodern phenomenon:

Social distinctions, previously marked by the ownership of particular kinds of consumer goods, now have to be established via the symbolism of 'aestheticized' commodities. (Knox, 1993, 18)

With capital's inward movement to create new markets, specifically its return to the city, social spaces which were to a certain extent only proto-capitalist and functioned not through the rule of money but through civic rules of cohabitation are now being colonized by capital. Civic and moral limits are stretched since the entertaining and gratifying aspects of what money can buy outweigh the old-fashioned benefits of more complex interactions of civic life. Here's an example: Starbucks has recently introduced a smartphone app that let's you "skip the line next time". In December 2014 it launched in Portland, OR, the walkable city par excellence, and in 2015 stores nation-wide have started to participate.





Three video/animation stills from Starbucks' mobile order app advertisement. 2015 [fair use]  
"Skip the line next time", *Starbucks'* website, accessed 16 September, 2015, [starbucks.com/coffeehouse/mobile-order](http://starbucks.com/coffeehouse/mobile-order)

The advertisement video plays with the urge of instant gratification when walking your dog, sitting in the tube or studying in the library. Starbucks offers you more time to walk your dog and more time to flirt on the Starbucks terrace thanks to their app which let's you skip the line of ordinary people who do not have the app yet or people who – in antediluvian style – go to the café, order there, and wait there. Flirting while waiting in line seems like a viable option to me. And, I wonder, what happens when so many app-orders come in that everyone has to stand in line again, but without the ordering interaction with the 'barista', instead, looking down at their app to see how many minutes away their drink still is? I am mentioning this simple situation of everyday walkable urban life because it is exemplary for capital's intervention into civic urban interaction. Standing in line is a basic rule and skill of cohabitation. If B sneaks in front of A, A will react in some way or the other, either silently angry or verbally defending his or her spot in the line. Now, with technology and money, the first come first serve rule of a line is brought to a virtual level. How do you know if the one in front of you ordered before you? Is there a line still when waiting for your app order? What are the rules of that line? The machine will decide who is next and which name the barista calls out. No line. No reference point of a rule to start a conversation on. New reference points maybe, alright, while the machine decides, we gratefully wait and enjoy the time Starbucks gives us. It works well, after all, it's efficient. As we are

constantly adapting together with technology Marcuse described this new matter-of-factness in the 1940s already and it is poignant still, as culture, technology and capitalism are getting more and more tightly interwoven:

And all this is indeed for his benefit, safety and comfort; he receives what he wants. Business, technics, human needs and nature are welded together into one rational and expedient mechanism. He will fare best who follows its directions, subordinating his spontaneity to the anonymous wisdom which ordered everything for him. The decisive point is that this attitude-which dissolves all actions into a sequence of semi-spontaneous reactions to prescribed mechanical norms is not only perfectly rational but also perfectly reasonable. All protest is senseless, and the individual who would insist on his freedom of action would become a crank. There is no personal escape from the apparatus which has mechanized and standardized the world. It is a rational apparatus, combining utmost expediency with utmost convenience, saving time and energy, removing waste, adapting all means to the end, anticipating consequences, sustaining calculability and security. (Marcuse, 1941, 143)

In this manner, with the help of technology, capital conquers spaces that had functioned on a socially and culturally defined basis, not on a money-defined basis. Indeed, the philosopher Michael Sandel has an entire chapter on “Jumping the Queue” in his reflections on how the moral limits of markets are transgressed (Sandel 2012). But capital needs new markets to continue, and the city with its many civil nooks and crannies is a great place to conquer and colonize, now that walkable urbanism is bringing back wealthy people to the city.

How did we get there? What are the cultural foundations of walkable urbanism? And what form does Walter Benjamin’s modern flâneur take in the urban fabric of postmodernity?

## 1.1. Walkable Urbanism and Visual Culture

Photographs do not simply render reality – realistically. It is reality which is scrutinized, and evaluated, for its fidelity to photographs. [...] Instead of just recording reality, photographs have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality, and of realism. (Sontag, 1973, 87)

So virulent has been the aestheticization of the world that the only strategy left is one of seduction, the empty, beguiling play of appearances, where critique loses its force and complacency and fascination take over. (Leach, 1999, 88)

Walkable urbanism is a trend in urban design and planning which promotes urban space that is more walkable than the traditional car-centered spaces. I understand the notion both in its urban design and in its cultural dimension. Walkable urbanism creates a new form of built environment, but it also, and possibly more strongly so, creates a social environment, a culture and a lifestyle. It is therefore more than an urban design style, it needs to be conceived in its societal dimension. In order to understand walkable urbanism as such a social phenomenon I suggest to study the cultural context which has brought forth the urban design and planning genre of walkable urbanism. In a dialectical approach, I see the phenomenon of the aestheticization of society and capitalism's continuous quest for new markets interweave and generate the society of the spectacle we live in. In this view, the imaginaries and the material manifestations of walkable urbanism are places of spectacle. Since Debord's publication of *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, technological progress has pushed the spectacular even further following his sociological insight of the spectacle being a social relation between people mediated by images. The irritating thing is that the analogue character of the social and political interest in making America more walkable seems to go against the grain of a spectacular society of simulacra and

pastiche. By showing how the aestheticization of society – the aesthetic flowing out from its conventional field into other fields of society and becoming a leitmotiv – works through an increase of the visual dimension in the social sciences as well as in its home disciplines of art and design, I want to show how this comes together in the disciplines and practices of urban design and planning and their production of walkable urbanism. In what follows I will therefore describe how the visual has become more and more important in the social sciences, in theatre and in architecture and how it has influenced the methods and techniques of research and display. I problematize this development as part and parcel of postmodernity, which I understand as a notion for culture and society in late capitalism.

## Dialectical Movements towards Aestheticized Walking

In order to understand the genealogy and the effect of the increasing importance of the iconic, I will outline the aestheticization of (Western) society, academia and art and design. This approach serves as a pillar to understanding why I consider walkable urbanism to produce places of spectacle and a commodified, aestheticized form of walking. Let's look at this pillar for a moment. As a contemporary theoretician of the modern (and postmodern) aestheticization process puts it, the current 'creativity dispositive' urges everyone to constantly bring forth something new and thereby feeds the aestheticization process (Reckwitz 2012a). This creative pressure comes from a more general process of aestheticization which is inherently modern.

Das Spezifikum ästhetischer Wahrnehmung ist ihre Selbstzweckhaftigkeit und Selbstbezüglichkeit, ihre Orientierung am eigenen Vollzug in diesem Moment. Ihr Spezifikum ist ihre Sinnlichkeit um der Sinnlichkeit, ihre Wahrnehmung um der Wahrnehmung willen.<sup>4</sup> (Reckwitz, 2012b, 93)

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<sup>4</sup> Translation: The specific dimension of aesthetic perception is that it is autotelic and self-referential, its focus on its own carrying out the task in this moment. The specific character is its sensuality for its sensuality's sake, its perception for its perception's sake.

Certainly, the aesthetic can be understood as an anthropological constant, he continues, but its extent changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it broadens its scope. Reckwitz conceives of this general aestheticization as the aesthetic which flows out of the defined spaces of art and into other social fields, often initiated from original aesthetic movements. Even though the aestheticization is at its strongest in postmodernity, he points to a long process of this phenomenon. Historically he locates the beginning of this process in the romantic era, during which larger domains of society were “colonized” by the current romantic characteristics of the aesthetic dimension and a specific ‘aesthetic subject’ was formed. Modernity brought forth three such subjects, he suggests, which correspond to three major stages of modernity. The bourgeois (bürgerliche) modernity, organized modernity and postmodernity have specific societal formations and specific aesthetic subjects, they correspond with waves of aestheticization: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romantic subject was in conflict with bourgeois values (bürgerlich, rational, self-disciplined, organized). The ideal subject of this era is the artist. Bohemian dreams and romantic love tried to break out from the expectations and rigid structures of the growing bureaucracy. The avant-garde subject of the organized modernity period, then, seeks disruptive experiences that it finds primarily in the growing city and the new mechanical reproduction of visual culture offers unending input for the avant-garde subject. Indeed, these new classes of the organized and rational period are becoming more and more aestheticized through the growing presence and influence of images (as discussed earlier). Out of the counter culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s emerges a third modern subject, the aesthetic subject. Hedonistic in its orientation, it also plays with the dissolution of the boundaries of signs and meanings. Here, Reckwitz’s typology comes very close to the way Frederic Jameson described postmodern culture and its being entangled with the logic of capitalism. Reckwitz holds that the initial conflict between aesthetic rebellion and transgression on the one side and reason and bureaucracy on the other side has gradually ceased and developed into an entanglement of the processes of aestheticization and commodification. He argues that the impressive scope of the aestheticization in postmodernity lies in the fact that it now also touches the professional job

situation which was the stronghold of organized, rationalized modernity. Today, 'creative practices' are producing and demanding new signs and symbols in what is called the 'creative economy' which then also redefines the identity of the employee or the producer per se<sup>5</sup> who no longer sees himself or herself as a person selling her labor power. The subsequent development of aesthetic subjects from the expressive romantic to the transgressive avant-garde to counter culture produces a subject today which combines elements of all of these subjects into a subject striving to increase its scope of experience (Erlebnis) and self-creation with a heightened physical and emotional sensibility in defined spaces such as the 'creative city'.

From a classical Marxist point of view, the argument would be posed the other way around. The economic infrastructure informs the cultural suprastructure. Here, it is capital which is in perpetual search for new markets and finds new potential in the aesthetic dimension which expands into the temporal and into the spatial dimensions. The transformation within modernity to dividing time into work and leisure brings along cultural modifications of daily schedules and how to occupy these new time frames. The working class, and, gradually, the growing middle class, also occupy new spaces that are policed and separated into different activities such as residential areas for sleeping vs. market and entertainment areas for shopping and leisure (still very present in American zoning structure). All these new spaces not only exist because of capitalism's quality of producing a social (including spatial) order, but social interaction and individual agency within these spaces are primarily a function of the dominant mode of production and therefore also serve its interests to a large extent. In this approach, the aesthetic development described by Reckwitz would then be an objective consequence of capital's interests to create new markets and to shape them rather than a primarily subject-motivated development. His argument that both aestheticization and commodification have a history but really increase only in postmodernity would, from the classic Marxist angle, be countered by

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<sup>5</sup> After decades of consumption we could speak of a new era of production albeit a pseudo-production to a certain degree which is characterized by creativity labels and quickly made products from crafts to blogs to starlets.

suggesting that commodification has been the long and steady process that can be traced back to the very beginnings of capitalist accumulation even before the French Revolution, this infrastructure has been shaping a suprastructure of culture including the shaping of existing cultural aspects and the creation of new ones.

From a critical theory point of view, the situation presents itself as more complex: Indeed, capital is in constant search for new markets. But, early on, it has found in the aesthetic dimension, a potent tool of suave repression which Adorno describes in his essays on the culture industry. The analysis of these mechanisms form the center-point of most of his writings, not just the ones referring explicitly to the culture industry. His aesthetic theory, however, is also grounded in a Hegelian philosophy which allows for more subjective wiggle room than the straight-forward objective approach of classic Marxism<sup>6</sup>. After enlightenment, the aesthetic is a dimension striving for autonomy, first from the church and from feudal donors, then from the instrumentalization for progress through reason and bureaucracy, then from the claws of dictatorship both left and right of the spectrum, then from cold war censorship and finally into free fall in postmodernity. In parallel, in the West, commodification has gradually entered every possible nook and cranny of society, even spheres which were historically still feudal or proto-capitalist (for instance education, civic rituals and urban rules) or spheres which were still private in the sense of being off-market (for instance family life, medicine, or spirituality). The aesthetic and the economic dimensions of society have experienced an enormous change through the all encompassing revolution that enlightenment brought forth. Their entanglement continues in a dialectical dance whose steps shape our societies. In our closer history, the aesthetic, the modern, the capitalist interweave in this dance, they create a fabric of an aestheticized yet diligently rationalized quest for producing surplus value. The urge for aestheticization is also the urge for commodification, but it comes in the disguise of creativity and design. This double urge

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<sup>6</sup> In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno urges Benjamin not to try too hard to scholarly follow material historicism's objective approach as he feels this would hinder the full unfolding of his "natural hand" or worse reduce his writings to an empirical enumeration of observed facts (he is speaking about the idea of the flâneur), rather, he suggest to pursue a "dialectical materialism" (T. W. Adorno & Benjamin, 2003, 102-103).

is widespread and in tune with larger postmodern yearnings reaching from creative (and aesthetic) expression and its publicity to a more nostalgic but rebellious desire to regain control of physical and spatial capacities (e.g. walking anywhere instead of driving on the interstate). It is in the contemporary phenomenon of aestheticized forms of walking in urbanism, in academia and in art that I observe the confluence of the aesthetic, the modern and the capitalist.

I see a dialectical movement between the thesis of aestheticization as an inherently modern process leading to today's aesthetic subject which has become entangled in commercial entertainment on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the thesis of capitalism's quest for new markets which, in this case, creates a spatial fix through the return to the city (as market). Out of these two movements comes walkable urbanism which is aestheticized urban design and aestheticized life-style. Zooming out of the city and into the aesthetic subject of postmodernity, these two movements create a synthesis in the form of aestheticized walking. The postmodern subject yearns to walk. It is a yearning for reclaiming agency. This yearning is a reaction to the car-centered landscapes, to previous spatial fixes in which the built environment was not built to human scale. It is also a yearning for physical capacity in a technologically assisted society. And it is a yearning for social and spatial agency, reclaiming ownership of social interactions and the use of the built environment and the landscape. This yearning happens in the context of postmodernity which brings along more than just the car-centered landscapes and environmental concerns that come with it. The highly aestheticized society at large, the open play with pastiche and historical reference in the constant re-forming of one's identity and therefore the performative character of every act together generate a form of walking which is aestheticized. Moreover, it is also compartmentalized. There is walkable walking in walkable urbanism's landscapes with its settings similar to stage sets and its designated areas for certain activities and certain kinds of walkable walking (shopping, dining, being entertained, visiting...). There are also other categories of aestheticized walking since this yearning and this new walking identity that the postmodern subject has found is reaching out into various fields. Aestheticized walking also reaches out into academia where walking as ethnographic and embodied research

method is gaining ground and opens new academic markets for production and publication. It also feeds the creative economy with a fresh creative labor force. It also reaches into art where walking moves up from being a basic element of art making (the actor enters the stage by walking, the dancer's basic move is a step, the painter or sculptor walks to a place outdoor to work) to becoming a form or even a genre of its own, thereby creating new markets as well – but also new forms of observation, expression and opportunities “to roam freely in imagination” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100)<sup>7</sup>.

This dialectical genealogy of current-day aestheticization and its interwoven relationship with economy creates the society of spectacle. Aestheticization and the increased use of images in our visually dominated culture are feeding the spectacle. Style and copy manifest through images. The postmodern identity is ever shifting, every self-constituting and self-referential. Every action is spectacle. The spectacle enters every sphere of life and even ever so basic actions as walking. A contributing element to this spectacle are aestheticized forms of walking. In order to problematize walking as an aestheticized form with specific influences from its social context, we need to understand walking not simply as this human kind of locomotion. Rather, we should understand walking in an anthropological way: walking is a cultural invariant, apart from specific exceptions, every human can walk. But how, when, why, where who walks changes with time and space. Moreover, walking is a performative act, in the sense that it co-creates one's social distinction and one's social identity. Back to the spectacle. It brings forth and is continued through contemporary aestheticized forms of walking. The society of the spectacle and the ongoing process of aestheticization bring forth aestheticized forms of walking which, in turn, co-create walkable urban design, walking-centered methods of research, as well as walking as art. In what follows I explore how the increase of the visual dimension in architecture research forms a source of inspiration for the focus on the visual in architecture, art and social science. I will start with the example of Venturi's work in architecture, *Learning from*

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<sup>7</sup> I will analyze this potential in Part 2, entitled Walks of Art.

*Las Vegas*, and how it pioneered (at least) two things: one, a certain form of visual ethnography that has its followers all over the social sciences, and two, an aestheticization of suburban kitsch, creating a slippery slope between affirmative and critical art that has been taken up by many visual artists and that I will illustrate through German theatre stage design. Venturi and his collaborators' work has had a strong effect in promoting the visual focus, especially the photographic image, in the methods and techniques of architecture and the social sciences and beyond. I will therefore later discuss the effects of aestheticization in the social sciences and in academia in general as I am painting the larger context which brought forth aestheticized forms of walking and walkable urbanism.

## Instant Iconology or Learning from Learning from Las Vegas

Images and social imaginaries play an important role in walkable urban design both for the designers and for the users of these spaces. To understand the rising use of the image in the social sciences, the arts and the theory and practice of urban design, planning and architecture, we need to consider postmodernity in its visual dimension which has contributed to shaping the aesthetisation of those disciplines. There are certainly various ways of going about this as the aestheticization of society has happened in many different fields, as I will discuss later. I chose to enter via a study of research and display methods that arose in postmodernity which have a strong focus on the visual. In particular, Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* appears to have played an important role in shaping the methods (and discourses) in architecture and urbanism (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1988). Largely known for its matter-of-fact approach to the vernacular built environment of Las Vegas, it has been criticized by various authors. The main critique points raised are Venturi and his co-authors' lack of contextualizing their study into the existing economic and political relations, according to the critics these are guiding much of the shaping of the built environment. Furthermore, the possibility that their study was and is

understood as a legitimization of wasteful, consumerist, car-centered construction is also a common concern of their critics. Martino Stierli, in his study of Venturi/Scott Brown/Izenour's work tries to draw a different picture of this publication in stating that it has a truly "subversive and critical dimension" to it, especially through its image-centered approach:

[...] the authors of *Learning from Las Vegas* were specifically concerned with employing the image as a means of critical analysis in order to propose a way out of the cul-de-sac into which late-modern architectural discourse had maneuvered itself. (Stierli, 2013 [2010])

Written in the 1970s, *Learning from Las Vegas* was produced right on the historic intersection of modernist architecture, urban renewal, postmodern urbanism and more generally postmodernist movements all across the disciplines from architecture to art and from the social sciences to the humanities. In defense of Venturi's subversiveness and the idea that Las Vegas is a city built "bottom-up" (Stierli, 2013 [2010], 258)– against the critique that he is the exact opposite of subversive and that it is not the people that built Las Vegas bottom-up but rather the real estate people from their desks – Stierli offers what he calls a methodological argument that goes like this: a) By integrating the banal, ugly and everyday aspects of architecture into the debate about modernist architecture and urbanism they actually helped overcome it. b) By understanding Las Vegas as an archetype of American urban popular culture of the post WWII era that is of importance despite the absence of architects or planners they broke with the utopian-idealistic tradition of the modernists by simply accepting the city as it was. c) By adopting visual social science and ethnology, backed-up by an interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology that is supposed to be value-free (looking and seeing instead of looking and knowing), they intended an "instant archaeology" of the architectural here and now in Las Vegas. d) Parallel projects in the field of the arts show similar encyclopedic and image-centered approaches that also foster the idea of valuing the 'experience' of the image and the city.

Let's think about instant methods for a moment since such theoretically unmediated ethnographically inspired practices are becoming rather popular in the social sciences (and in

the arts). I refer to this study because Stierli has chosen to problematize the image-centered approach of Venturi et al. which is of interest for my iconological study of contemporary walkable urbanism. The origin and the long term effect of *Learning from Las Vegas* might help shed some light on the understanding of contemporary walkable urbanism. Indeed, despite the fact that New Urbanists and other promoters of 'sustainable' and 'pedestrian-centered' design see Las Vegas as the anti-Christ of their mission, their approach has incorporated certain aspects of the postmodern urbanism that appeared in the wake of the production of and debate around *Learning from Las Vegas*. Fragmentation might be the clearest element in Venturi's 'methodology'. Methodology is probably too strong a word, since 'method' in US social science comes down to 'technique' rather than an approach that is epistemologically coherent and reflected, as Adorno has pointed out in his reflections on scholarship in America:

I was disturbed, rather, by a basic methodological problem –understanding the word 'method' more in its European sense of epistemology than in its American sense, in which methodology virtually signifies practical techniques for research.  
(Adorno, 1969, 343)

In the meantime, this lighter understanding of method has penetrated the European social sciences, as Stierli's use of it shows; and fragmentation might be a causing element. In any case, we can understand Venturi's populist approach, as Stierli suggests, as a postmodern celebration of the heterogeneity present in society and thereby think of it as democratic and 'bottom up. Fragmentation, however, does fragment everything, especially our capacity of contextualizing buildings and their arrangement in space and time: "Discontinuity [...] is then seen as emblematic of the disappearance of certain relationships to history and the past." (Stephanson & Jameson, 1989, 5) The idea of creating an 'instant archaeology' by referring to phenomenology has seen some popularity in the social sciences in the last couple of decades. Not only in architectural studies, but in many works of human geography and ethnography, for example, phenomenology has been put forth almost as a critique of the ruling positivist and functionalist social sciences. The problem with this is, that the positivist dominance needs to be

challenged with a qualitative approach that includes the historicity and the political dimension of the social phenomena studied, rather than, similar to a teenage child that opposes the father, refuse method all together. Indeed, applying phenomenology without contextualizing, historicizing the observations, as Merleau-Ponty emphasized, is not leading to any insight on the social order studied:

[F]or Merleau-Ponty, the 'natural attitude' of common sense leads us to overlook the phenomenon of the perceived world. For Merleau-Ponty's account of the role of the senses in perception is that they make it their business to cover their tracks as they organize experience in such a way that it presents to us a world of things arrayed before us in a three-dimensional objective space within which we are located as just another object. So as we get on with our life we do not notice the role of the senses in organising experience and 'constituting' the physical world; it is precisely their business to make this role invisible to us. Hence to rediscover and articulate it, we have somehow to get a detached, 'sideways', look at ordinary experience. (From the introduction to Merleau-Ponty, 2004, 12)

The senses' hidden or automatic self-organizing in relation to dominant cultural principles promotes the inherent risk of postmodern 'instant archaeologies' of the 'everyday'. It is the risk contained also in what often is associated with embodied research, in which the body and its senses (e.g. vision, as in the use of photography and videography for collecting 'data') are used as research tools. In such research, the body is understood as a neutral research tool, as if there was no incorporation of social norms and values whatsoever in the body's form, posture, perception, etc. David Harvey has criticized the use of such a natural-neutral body as 'measure of all things' in postmodern research tendencies that use the body as research tool (David Harvey 1999; David Harvey 2000), a tool where the assumed neutrality has to legitimize an assumed scientific objectivity. In turn, Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'hexis' are most helpful for trying to contextualize the body and to consider the various social dimensions that get incorporated into the body – both from the side of the owner of the body and from the outside. Sensory and embodied research, therefore, should try and attempt a minimum of

methodological positioning or reflexivity by objectifying its research tools (the body and its senses) in what Bourdieu calls a participant objectivation in the form of an epistemological positioning or self-analysis (Bourdieu 2003). There is of course the question of where this leads, where this attempt to objectify, meaning to sociologically and methodologically contextualize) the qualitative starts and where it should end, and Gillian Rose has clearly stated that such an endeavor might be limiting the newly gained freedom through postmodernism represented in notions such as 'transparent reflexivity' especially in feminist approaches. However, what she suggested does not seem too empowering either but it is a reflection of science's constructed truths:

“We cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it. What we may be able to do is something rather more modest but, perhaps, rather more radical: to inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands.” (Rose, 1997, 319)

With these considerations about ethnographic and visual methods I intend to point out the pioneering iconographic work done by Venturi and his colleagues that initiated a turn in what is still today a predominance of the aestheticized photographic image in architecture, urban geography and disciplines on the intersection of social sciences and the arts that investigate the urban built environment. Architecture and urban design are by definition highly visual disciplines and practices. It is the abundant and stylized use which makes the photographer shine through every image of a building like a hologram and turns him/her into the main protagonist that risks to aestheticize the product such that it is more about the creativity and publicity of the maker than about the thing studied.

Venturi and his collaborators' use of drive-through imagery has opened the gates to an unmediated ethnographic study of the built environment which they called “instant archaeology”.

[ [image](#) ]

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown during their 1968 studio trip in Las Vegas introducing the 'instant archeology'.  
Photograph © VSBA Archives  
From: Song, Stamp, Park, "Learning from 'Learning from' – On Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, and the Recent Yale Symposium on their Works and Writings" *Architect*. February 22, 2010,  
<http://archinect.com/features/article/96145/learning-from-learning-from-i-on-robert-venturi-and-denise-scott-brown-and-the-recent-yale-symposium-on-their-works-and-writings>

This approach, however, has contributed to the aesthetisation and anaesthetization of our photographic culture. I will spend some time explaining how. Their pictures create icons of Americana, they aestheticize Las Vegas, including and continuing the aestheticization of the car, simply by framing them into a photograph, such is the force of the image. The ethnographic document becomes a photograph with a particular aesthetic. The everyday building and landscape of car-centered America receives a cult-like status that semi-proudly represents what is supposed to be American culture. The aestheticization of this American capitalist landscape fascinates architects, urban designers and planners alike. It also oozes a specific attraction to European photographers (professional and semi-professional, and tourists) who leap at those gas stations, motels, endless strip malls with chain signs, in a mixture of awe and arrogance, looking forward to bringing back the illustrious prey to their Continental peers. Much of this is far from the anthropological spirit of photographer Robert Frank's 'The Americans' (Frank and Kerouac 1959). If it is also far from Venturi's ethnographic spirit is not clear. What is clear is that he to a certain extent offered an analysis of the commodified landscapes of suburbia and thereby contributed to opening up the door to a phenomenological and superficially ethnographic approach in architectural research and even beyond, in the social sciences which, one would think, are interested in the social and geographical context of architecture.

The problem here is that within the depthlessness of our current culture of the instantaneous, the significance of context is eroded. It is this very lack of any sense of context – of historical or geographic specificity – that facilitates the process of fetishization. And certainly it is this that allows the authors of

*Learning from Las Vegas* to abstract the forms of Las Vegas and overlook their social significance, and it is this that allows them to reinscribe other such forms in their own built work with so little regard for their original meaning. (Leach, 1999, 87)

Highly photogenic, this spatial form of capitalism of the post-war decades (still) offers endless material for documentations, films, and the illustration of any kind of research. Indeed, their instant archeology has brought forth instant ethnographies of all kinds. Las Vegas by car is also the pinnacle of non-American imaginaries about America as I will discuss now.

### Aestheticization of Art: Images of Americana in Theatre

An example of the aesthetisation of American landscapes and life-styles – heavily influenced by this kind of visual research – is to be found in the European performing arts. Especially in Germany (Volksbühne and other places), where since the 1990s many plays have been transposed into the present by giving them a lower middle-class American setting with the corresponding costumes, a mixture of Texas and Las Vegas stereotypes that the European audience found to be cult and utterly vulgar at the same time. These performances and set-designs conveyed images which transported inter-cultural stereotypes, meant as a stark critique of capitalism's raw effects on American life and culture as well as its rippling effect on Europe in a fear of 'Americanization'. They were received as a mixture of cool and confirmation of Continental European distinction. The impressive amount of stage and costume design that have been imitating some sort of Americana during the 1990s up to present times is telling. Certainly, many films have been an inspirational source for this kind of aesthetics, for instance Wim Wenders' 1984 *Paris Texas*. And the aesthetics of the road movie genre in general oozes a never-ending fascination for Europeans. Film is the big adversary of the analogue arts as its

moving images simply have an overpowering effect – which only hardens my argument that the aestheticization process is fueled through images and the visual.

[ [image](#) ]

Still from Wim Wenders' film *Paris, Texas*, 1984, showing El Rancho Motel and establishing a distinct visual style.  
© Wim Wenders, 1984 [fair use]  
From: *Filmap*, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://filmap.tumblr.com/post/80117328498/paris-texas-wim-wenders-1984-el-rancho-motel>

Bert Neumann from the Berlin Volksbühne has pioneered this theatrical style, but he is probably also the only one with a more critical eye. His set designs remind us of Venturi's sketches of Las Vegas' buildings and sheds. He was a pioneer and master of this kind of set design in German theatre and, contrary to many of his imitators, managed to walk on the thin path that he co-created and that sits between the affirmative reproduction of the empty spectacle and the critical play with our visual culture, our schemes of interpretation and entertainment.

[ [image](#) ]

Set design by Bert Neumann for a piece by René Pollesch in 2014: *House for Sale*.  
© Lenore Blievernicht, LSD  
From: Tobias Becker, "Pollesch in Berlin: Leb, als wärst du jeden Tag das Letzte!", *Kultur, Spiegel Online*, September 11, 2014, <http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/volksbuehne-house-for-sale-von-rene-pollesch-mit-sophie-rois-fotos-fotostrecke-118876-5.html>

The immense red plastic curtain as a backdrop could represent a never-ending sunset. The cheap little house reminds us of Venturi's sketches of sheds in Las Vegas. It is stripped of the ornament, there is no duck built around it, no neon sign blinking 20 feet above. Is it a Venturian monument of the housing crisis? The woman on the left is wearing a cowboy hat, the staple sign of Americana for non-Americans. The Director is René Pollesch, a playwright who often mixes

theoretical text with theatrical material, here a mix of Slavoj Žižek, *Starsky and Hutch* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and a playlist of cool songs covered by his stunning actresses: Pollesch's work is straightforward postmodern, postdramatic theatre<sup>8</sup>. There are messages conveyed, there is social and cultural distinction reproduced, but not without the use of pastiche and the consequent emptiness of content. The play with the affirmative simulacra as described by theatre critic Peter Laudenbach in the following quote is a dance on the volcano that not many theatre creators managed well.

Bert Neumann arbeitete gerne höhnisch mit Ready Mades aus der tristen, bunten Warenwelt: Wenn sich die Wirklichkeit dauernd inszeniert und die Gesellschaft des Spektakels so tut, als sei sie die Wirklichkeit, reicht es, ihre Oberfläche zu kopieren und elegant zu verfremden, um daraus böses Theater zu machen. Er hat den Designverhältnissen der Warengesellschaft ihre eigenen Benutzeroberflächen und Schauwerte vorgespielt, um sie so leer und absurd vorzuführen, wie sie sind.<sup>9</sup> (Laudenbach 2015)

Neumann was a master of balancing on the fine line between affirmative and subversive art. Pollesch's theatre drifts off into the hot smoke and lava of simulacra. Neumann has many followers, but most of them fall into the affirmative abyss together with Pollesch. Post-modern and so called post-dramatic German/European theatre, despite its fervent commitment to social critique, has become a victim of its own means of aesthetisation and, borrowing Neil Leach's term for a similar process in architecture, of anesthetization (Leach 1999). There is no image too shocking, no scene too uncomfortable for postmodern theatre, but also no image very evocative anymore. Everything has already been seen. But everything has its shimmering attraction through its highly aestheticized form. Neumann, on the contrary, produced set design which were almost installations. He opened the doors for many post-dramatic elements, even invented

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<sup>8</sup> A format discussed in the second part of this dissertation in which further dimensions of postmodernity are studied to shed light on the aestheticized form of walking as art.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: Bert Neumann liked to work derisively with ready mades from the sad and colorful world of commodities: If reality is constantly staging itself and if the society of the spectacle pretends to be reality, then copying its surface and elegantly alienating it is enough to make subversive theatre out of it. He mirrored the interfaces and visual values of the design relations in the commodified society and presented them as empty and absurd as they are.

some, but always reigned them in through a strong artistic hand and vision. A trait, that is sadly uncommon in postmodern theatre, even undesired. The heavy and repeated use of design and imagery to imitate the 'vulgaria' of American suburbia (Knox 2005a) as a place-holder for critique has gradually replaced critique with those images, and with it remains an affirmative art with a simple critique – bad capitalism, bad USA, stupid middle class that is taken for a ride, but all is somehow very cool – that has become part of an attitude, an allure and a style as well, nothing more. Or should we close with Bourdieu's introduction to his *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*<sup>10</sup>:

Because photography, apparently at least, lends itself very badly to properly sociological study, it provides the desired opportunity to prove that the sociologist, concerned with deciphering that which is only ever common sense, can deal with images without becoming visionary. And to those who expect sociology to provide them with 'visions' what can one say, except, along with Max Weber, 'that they should go to the cinema'. (Bourdieu, 1991, 132)

Aestheticization in Academia:

Social and Academic Reproduction of the Spectacle

The production of images has always been in direct relation to technology and technological invention. There is a connection between the development of photographic cameras and how we see the world, even how we act to be seen, as the image has become such a strong reference in our culture we work to keep up, build and represent images. Similarly, and particularly in the case of walkable urban design, the appearance of computer renderings of architectural and urban design has to be understood in its dialectical relation with society. Technology influences our grasp of society, of buildings, of urban spaces, and by using

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<sup>10</sup> This is from a translated version that was reprinted as a journal article. See references for details.

technology in creating this built environment, technology leaves its imprint just as society influences technological progress. It is a dialectical relationship.

In architecture, as in most disciplines and crafts, technology has gone hand in hand with what was possible to imagine and to create, often bringing along a whole set of techniques, craftsmanship and also rituals and beliefs associated to those techniques. Technology can be in the form of stage lighting (from candles to overhead projectors) or the quality of paint and brushes, in the form of tools (a pencil) or in the form of software (CAD). Architecture, urban design and planning all use imaging to create a representation of their ideas. With the advent of computer assisted graphic design the 3D model is often substituted by renderings of the idea. The difference between such renderings and the real site might be a telling field of inquiry. Indeed, for architecture, a critique has been uttered that there is a tendency (fostered primarily in architecture schools) to design fantastic renderings that have, in turn, nothing much to do with the real site of the projects in question:

The idea of the perfect architectural image is not only propagated by professors who prioritize the rendering over its practical implications (causing students to spend hours perfecting visuals instead of perfecting the design), but also by the architecture media [...]. Architecture media presents a flood of glossy shots that 'sell' an idealized architecture to the public and, frankly, architects themselves. (Quirk 2013).

[...[image](#) ]

Rendering of a design for Penn Station.

© Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's (SOM)

Image presented in Vanessa Quirk, quoted above, "Are Renderings Bad for Architecture?," *arch daily*, June 6, 2013, [archdaily.com/383325/are-renderings-bad-for-architecture](http://archdaily.com/383325/are-renderings-bad-for-architecture)

The virtual dimension of architectural design and of the smart-phone-dependent new generations seems to clash with the analogue historical reference of many walkable urbanism

designs. But in postmodernity this mixture is possible. They are somehow related in their spectacular dimension and maybe even in the spectacular dimension of their producers' life-style.

As for photography, Walter Benjamin offered an analysis in his seminal works "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin, 1977a) and "A Short History of Photography" (Benjamin, 1977b), saying that it is not only what we do with photography, it is also what photography does with us, with the so called creative process, or with the research process. What he described was, and which is most commonly known about these works, that technological reproduction of art, as in reprints of paintings, or in prints of photographs, strips the original work of art of its 'aura', of its soul so to speak, and any wish for a transcendental or cathartic aesthetic experience is lost through this kind of use of technology, despite many efforts to re-introduce the missing aura through retouching the picture. In Benjamin's times it was the improvement of light sensitivity that wiped out the last corners in which the aura would hide out in a picture. And at the same time the subject was utterly aware of the moment of representation of their social status.

[Group photographs and portraits] were produced in premises where from the outset each customer met in his photographer a technician of the latest school and where the photographer met in every customer a member of a class on the ascendant, replete with an aura which penetrated to the very folds of his bourgeois overcoat or bow-tie. For the mere manufacture of a primitive camera does not in itself constitute an aura. Rather in the early times do object and technique correspond as clearly as they diverge in the succeeding period of decline. Soon an advanced optics would be using instruments capable of overcoming darkness completely and of registering objects with the clarity of a mirror. Nevertheless, the photographers of the post-1880 period saw it as their task to simulate with the aid of all the arts of retouching, especially the so-called rubber print, that aura which had been removed in just the same way from the picture by more powerful cameras, as it had from reality by the increasing degeneration of the imperialist bourgeoisie. (Benjamin, 1972, 19)

In our days it might be high definition image quality and ever quicker shutter release times, leading to less image composition and more snatching of scenes in an illusion of reality photography (like reality TV).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, iPhones (as a primary instrument for taking photographs) offer an editing filter that alludes to old silver prints with an uneven black frame and a touch of colorization, hinting at the aura. Only, this is an added aura and not one coming from the scene that was photographed. This is a form of what is called ‘augmented reality’, a notion that usually describes layers of links and data and graphics that are added onto photographs or videos of ‘reality’, thereby augmenting it with additional information. Much of what Google Glass offers is instant augmented reality.



The Google Glass eyewear providing an augmented reality.

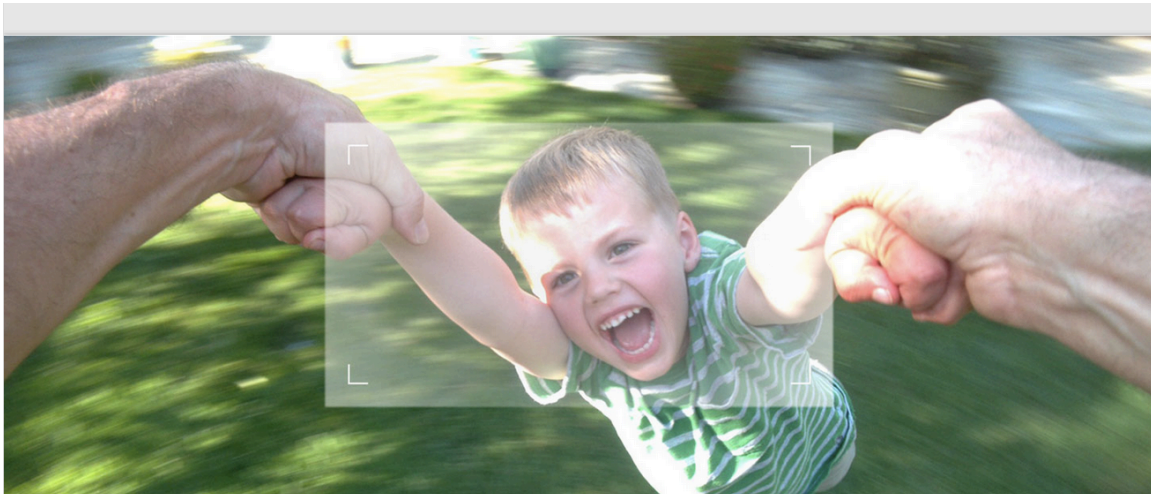
Google; Google Glass; introductory website to Google glass, (accessed July 16, 2013) [google.com/glass/start/what-it-does](http://google.com/glass/start/what-it-does) (in 2015 the content of the site has changed, linking to “Glass at Work”, a collection of business partners working with Google Glass)

Photography, through its very technology that implies snatching an image, a moment in time, and imprinting it onto photosensitive paper, or, saving it to an SD card, makes this art both a

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<sup>11</sup> The omnipresent GoPro camera which one mounts to the head when – ideally – performing some sort of outdoor sports probably represents this trend the best. It’s HD quality is meant to record the shaky images of your descent down the slopes, your fall out of the plane, your jump from the rock. Their tag line then is: GoPro – Be a Hero. It is also participating in this urge to hold fast everything you do. But who wants to see the wiggly images from your ride down the mountain bike trail? And why? The camera firm suggests – or dictates – what kind of ‘films’ to produce with this camera. So if you want to be that hero, you’ll need to produce a set of shaky recordings of your leisure time ‘adventures’. Not only is the kind of video image defined in this, but also the image of what a hero is and does is pre-defined in this setting. And telling by the sales of this camera worldwide, people, especially men, seem to like to strive for that image.

mecanic and a social one, and Benjamin observes the same with the persons in front of the camera. He compares photography to the piano, as opposed to painting that would be closer to the violin, where the musician has to tune and find the note, rather than unmistakably hitting it with the key.



Say "take a picture" to take a picture.

You wear Google Glass and your gaze becomes a camera, your environment becomes a constant subject, as this little boy has learnt.

Google; Google Glass; introductory website to Google glass, (accessed July 16, 2013) [google.com/glass/start/what-it-does](http://google.com/glass/start/what-it-does) (in 2015 the content of the site has changed, linking to "Glass at Work", a collection of business partners working with Google Glass)

I refer to Benjamin here not to repeat the discussion if photography is "only" a document or an actual art, but rather to show the social effect of its very mechanism on the mind behind the camera, and even on the minds and bodies in front of the camera in an image society, in a society of the spectacle, thirsty for that bizarre dialectic between the imaginary and "the real". Not only is the image reproducible now, but the scene in front of the camera is reproducible by the interconnection of forces which want to feed the spectacular with particular scenes in a kind of repetitive social reproduction. We could argue that the mechanical reproduction of the photograph, the possibility of spreading images all over the world, first in prints, now digitally on

the internet, leads to the social reproduction of the scene, of the roles of the persons in that scene, of the values and power relations they abide to.

How does this apply to the aestheticization of academia? After having seen some effects of the technological development of photography on photographs, photographers and the photographed (or films, filmers, and filmed) in a private setting, let's look at the proliferation of the visual with the use of photography and video in research and design where the increasing use of imagery reflects the aesthetisation of academic research.

In architecture, while the architect's work is by definition a highly aesthetic one that works with photography, renderings and sculptural representation of the designs, this basic nature has been overtaken by the need to aestheticize it even more and to feast on the visual representation of the creative process. More and more architectural exhibitions – in schools or in galleries – show works in progress. There, every note book and sketch is exhibited as if it was the work itself. While we clearly are in a phase in which the creative process is highly valued in research and education in opposition to quantitative and more technical approaches – indeed, “design thinking” (Rowe 1998) is all the rage – the qualitative initiatives often stop at the level of illustration that represents an idea of a creative process. No buildings are built from those architectural note books and sculptures, no theory constructed from insights made in the creative process. Interestingly the work in progress trend has started long ago. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno writes about modern art:

The previous generation had already limited the pure immanence of artworks, which at the same time they drove to its extreme: by employing the author as commentator, by the use of irony, and by the quantity of detail artfully protected from the intervention of art. From this arose the pleasure of substituting for the artworks the process of their own production. Today every work is virtually what Joyce declared *Finnegans Wake* to be before he published the whole: work in progress. (Adorno, [1970] 1997, 26)

This problem is discussed in architectural scholarship. A publication from 'The Architectural Review' that focuses on 'Architecture and Representation' (1395, May, 2013) points out the dialectical interaction between ideas and tools. The argument is that the final test of the construction does not have to happen to validate the idea. Rather, the design process can be understood as a way to imagine new things, to speculate, to paint with a broad brush like theory that thinks big to allow the bigger picture and unthought-of of possibilities to be revealed:

For while it is probable that the trajectories of ideas and tools develop more-or-less in tandem – sometimes one being ahead, sometimes the other, and in different strands – it is how the architectural concepts that they represent intersect with the possibility of construction which is the final test. But does that mean every idea has to be built to be validated? Not at all. The richness of ideas presented here, the value of describing radical visions for the future, of speculating about an architecture that may never exist, and of pursuing notions that may go nowhere at all: these are an essential part of architecture as a risk-taking discipline. It is these endeavours that keep the culture of architecture alive, and ultimately push built reality to greater heights. (Hunter, 2013, 35)

It will need the architects' vigilance to keep research open to this potential rather than simply following the trend in which the new hope invested into the creative process makes anything into art and art into research. Whence this research frenzy anyway? Why does every intellectual and artistic endeavor need to spit out data?

Many social scientists now like to grab a camera and venture into visual ethnographic research. As most of them lack aesthetic training and are simply interested in using a camera, the outcomes of the various 'visual' geographies, anthropologies and sociologies are thin. Worse, the illustrations tend to run the show. The critique of mainstream quantitative approaches, which underlies many of these ventures, is well-intended, but the sensory, most commonly visual – and often labeled embodied – research practice come down to a simple phenomenology or neo-phenomenology of direct experience. Just like Venturi's 'instant archeology', this is an instant ethnography. It is instant almost in the culinary meaning of the term: pre-fabricated and quick.

The interdisciplinarity of such approaches, often in terms of arts-integrated research to which I will come back a little further down, sits mostly in the label. Images are used for trend's sake, because research is experiencing an aestheticization where the style, the technique is more important than the theory or the actual insight.

There are tendencies (and journals) in the social sciences specifically called 'visual' anthropology, geography or sociology. Those focus primarily on sensory methods for their research with a preference for the visual. Access to new digital media has become cheaper and easier, it allows the broad use of video and photo cameras in qualitative, mostly ethnographic, approaches. The trend for interdisciplinary and 'creative' methods brought with it a rise in the use of images, or rather pictures. A certain aesthetic quality almost seems to be a prerequisite for certain 'styles' of research – quickly separating the works into the heavily stylized graphic works and the less skilled 'creative' endeavours, they both feature the image as a must, both misunderstanding the social dimension of the image by following this aesthetisation of research. Through this aesthetisation of the social sciences through the use of images an emphasis on visual material rather than on its content can be observed. An inclination for photographic or video work for ethnographic approaches in geography generates more and more works that either display imagery or use photography or video as the medium of discovery and research itself. The long forgotten inspiration in Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's foundational work of visual anthropology entitled "Balinese Character, A Photographic Analysis" (Bateson and Mead 1942) clearly discerns between simply documenting and the possibility of reading cultural dimensions thanks to images. The images surely do provide a certain creative dimension. While there is much potential in such interdisciplinarity involving the arts, there is also the risk of contributing to Debord's society of the spectacle by literally being under the spell of the image(s). Design, style, and trend of those tend to conceal both what a particular research is or could be about and what this kind of approach could actually reveal. It appears that these approaches foster a kind of self-referentiality, as if the dependent variable was the production of

the image itself, which is already proven by the production of the image, which, confronts us with the self-referential characteristics of postmodernism.

The use of images, both in method and in display, is influenced by the time and place and social dimensions that the images are being made and displayed in. The fact that we are a highly visual culture requires more epistemological vigilance when using images than might appear necessary. Especially if the social sciences are interested in sensory approaches they should avoid the unquestioned application of photography and video in an assumption that the social sciences are per se visual sciences, as stated by Gillian Rose in the case of geography:

...those geographers asserting the ocularcentrism of geography are doing so only as a prelude to studies of other sensory articulations of knowledge, most commonly aural. Clearly, this move has produced much valuable work. However, it seems to assume that since we, as geographers in a “visual discipline”, already understand “the visual”, it is now important for us to analyze the geographies of other senses. This assumption is surely mistaken. (Rose, 2003, 212)

In the case of anthropology, a strong proponent of sensory approaches is Sara Pink. Her understanding is probably best illustrated by her piece ‘Walking with Video’ which combines an embodied research method of walking with the use of video. It leaves the reader puzzled over the actual interest of the endeavor as the current vocabulary of cultural geography and even planning is used programmatically but without content, or to paraphrase Pink, without actual sense made: “In this context video is not merely a method of audio-visually recording people and physical settings. Rather, as I shall elaborate in this article, walking with video provides ways of (to paraphrase Feld and Basso) sensing place, placing senses, sensorially making place and making sense of place.” (Pink, 2007, 243) Embodied research practices are a most interesting and promising field in the current trends in qualitative research, however, if they lack any theoretical construction for an interpretation of the observed and experienced, then their claim to critique positivist approaches doesn’t hold up. An earlier debate between Ruth Holliday

and Sara Pink discusses the (lack of) reflexivity of visual anthropology (Pink 2001; Holliday 2000). Maybe those approaches are still too young and in an experimental phase and one should grant them more time, however, as I have experienced myself in walking research, the sensory experience of the body and mind need to be objectified in their geographical and historical specificity as well as in their epistemological frame in order to make any relevant statement as suggested by the social anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2003). Moreover, in embodied research, we cannot presume that the body is a natural and therefore neutral instrument for research or even the “measure of all things” (D Harvey 1998). An interesting debate took place on the topic of the senses and anthropology between Sarah Pink (Sensory Ethnography), again, and Constance Classen (Anthropology of the Senses), with some mediation by David Howes (Pink and Howes 2010). While Sarah Pink marvels in the bounty of using her senses when ‘walking with video’ or sniffing ‘dirty laundry’ (Pink 2005), Classen analyses the broader arch of dominant value systems, gender relations and other power relations at work in the various uses of the senses. She analyses the social construction of the uses and the attributions of the senses to analyze the social order of a given population: “Issues of politics and gender are permeated by sensory values, as are all issues of importance to a culture, from religious beliefs and practices to the production and exchange of goods.” (Classen, 1997, 410) Pink represents a strong UK movement of ethnographers experimenting with new media, auto-ethnographic, and performative approaches to cultural geography and ethnography that, at a closer look, all represent characteristics of postmodern contradictions – or, what Jameson would call pastiche (Jameson 1998). Classen, Canadian, builds her approach much more on critical social anthropology in the French tradition, which makes her more helpful for my approach.

Gillian Rose frames the trend for the visual in the realm of geography in a crucial question in her article titled “On the Need to Ask How, exactly, is Geography ‘Visual’?” (Rose 2003) Through the advent of the image and the spectacle in our Western societies and indeed the entire globalized world, the visual character of communication is undeniably the strongest compared to other

senses and ways of communicating. The necessity to distinguish various levels and kinds of visibility is key when trying to organize the trend for the visual, especially in research where a certain epistemological vigilance helps to separate ideology from method. The fact the geography works with visual maps does not make it a specifically visual discipline, the fact that more and more human geographers apply visual ethnographies with their cameras and journals does not make it outstandingly visual either. Whence this urge in every discipline to be visual as well? It seems, disciplines are all hurrying to turn the corners of postmodernism's many turns, from linguistic to spatial to post-colonial to pictorial and iconic. That we live in a society of the spectacle as Debord put it or in an aestheticized society in which the image and aesthetics play a major role in fields as different as television, architecture and research methods contributes to the rising interest in the visual. As the accessibility of video and photographic cameras as well as free publication opportunities online have lessened the quality of much of the visual work we get to see online, the mainstreaming of the need to be visual has also diluted the notion and the understanding of the image so that a focus on iconology seems appropriate at this time.

The combination of art and social sciences needs conscious methodological and theoretical construction, otherwise it is simply assumed that art is a neutral, objective methodological tool that provides us with social data. The body as a neutral research tool is invoked in more sensory approaches, an 'instant' technical choice which really cancels every sociological insight on gender, class and other social dimensions in regard to our bodies. The body as research 'tool' needs to be theorized, theoretically constructed, because, its meaning and our sensory processing is socially constructed. This can happen either during the research, or, as suggested by practice-led artist-scholars, in the form of an exegesis afterwards – an epistemological reflection on the work that is done in order to gain epistemological and theoretical insight from the practice-led research process (Sullivan 2010; Barrett 2004; Barrett and Bolt 2010).<sup>12</sup> A new approach also requires a new epistemological vigilance, since the aestheticization of research

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<sup>12</sup> This dissertation sprang from the exegesis of my audio-walk project *Blacksburg Walks* in 2011.

introduces qualitative elements such as the embodied experience, the senses, the artistic allusion which all reflect the deep layering of our social life. It can be a bubbling source as well as a trap.

Epistemologically, we appear to be in tumultuous times. Arts-integrated approaches supposedly are rocking the fleet of quantitative and other systematical methods. Maybe there are only more ships sailing the academic sea. Presenting a new research and design process might just be as far as we are getting today. But the outlook holds far bigger transformations and possibilities. More and more architectural labs produce art and design as research or research as making where they showcase the creative process. And many other disciplines follow suit. Indeed, from higher education's pedagogy to managers' seminars, architecture's design studios are often the very example other fields follow in trying to apply 'design thinking' to their field.

The interesting thing then becomes how we use the specific aesthetic dimensions of art, the new and uncommon ways of seeing, perceiving, sensing and thinking our objects of study. Not only the social sciences, which I am most familiar with, are experimenting with more aesthetic, sensory, ways of doing research. There is huge interest between the arts and engineering as well as the arts and the natural sciences. The conundrum of using science on art, here, is similar to that of physics trying to analyze the most minuscule and intimate particles of our material world without destroying it with the research tools. Sociology and anthropology can attempt to theorize art and understand its making and its reception in its societal context. Still, there remains an unknown which is also the door to imagination and one of the reasons we want to have art in our lives. The empirical eagerness of science might not be the best ally for art's treasures. That is exactly what happens, though, when, today, analysts search for measurable benefits of art in education and research. Does it further critical and creative thinking of students and researchers? Do we get more data? Does it further this and that? How much so? When exactly? Is it better for my brain development to visit an exhibit of paintings or participate in a theatrical improvisation workshop? In this approach, art is dissected. What is detectable as tools

of the creative process is separated and applied in other fields, the promesse de bonheur of art is cut into little Cartesian pieces of empirical evidence of art's benefits that now can be reaped without getting our hands dirty with clay or paint and without needing to spend endless hours sitting in an uncomfortable theatre chair. After all, the aesthetic turn in academia is not about aesthetics or about art<sup>13</sup>, it is about updating the colleges' machinery in order to adapt to the changing demands of the market: to produce a creative labor force to serve the 'creative economy'.

The postmodern aesthetic subject's desire for experimental transgression and playful identity shifts cannot wiggle itself out of modernity's rational grip. Today, in late capitalism, the aestheticization process in its continuous struggle with modernity's principles has reached a stage so intertwined that the struggle itself has become aestheticized *and* commodified. And capitalism's need for new creative labor force to feed the 'creative economy' needs to be produced at the university. University, like certain parts of the city, discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, was still a proto-capitalist space, a remnant of bourgeois values of liberal education and autonomous research. The advance of the corporate logic into academia undermines this 'ivory tower'. It is ironic that elements of pre-capitalist liberal education – aesthetics and art – are now the agents of this commodification.

The aestheticization process happens in various fields at the same time, the effects are similar. The process of aestheticization in academia shows similar issues as the phenomenon of walkable urbanism. A faint rebellion against modernity's rational principles that are applied in academia through certain dominant methodologies (methodological individualism, empiricism, functionalism, behaviorism, quantitative approaches). Capitalism appropriates this strive for its own profit, aesthetics and art are co-opted for the academic production of a so called creative labor force for the new markets of the creative economy.

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<sup>13</sup> The discussion if an aestheticization process necessarily involves art is one that needs to be held. Creativity, design and the aesthetic dimension today are used as synonyms to art but are dissected into their potential utilitarian functions. Especially, in the context described above, when art is dissected, the reference to art is all the more misleading.

## Aestheticization in Urban Design and Planning:

### Images and Imaginaries of Urbanity

What follows is a step towards an iconology of walkable urbanism, an analysis of the iconic or visual dimension (rather than singular images) of walkable urban design. It focuses on the creation of images (or imaginaries) of walkable places in urban design and what they hold to offer in terms of an aesthetic, sensual, creative urban experience of movement and interaction. The landscapes and buildings we live in are more than a combination of material, form and function. Indeed, the environment created by architects, planners, designers, developers, homeowners and many more are both a reflection of our society, our culture, and actively producing that society (Knox and Ozolins 2000; Delitz 2009). Architectural construction is social construction. The landscaped and built environments tell us how a society spatially organizes its subjects, but they also tell us how subjects reorganize that spatial order. Architecture and society are in a dialectical relation to each other; this is how I suggest to read walkable urbanism and walking. Landscape and built environment also inform us about a society's images and imaginaries: What is this society's history, and what are its perspectives? What is its 'promesse de bonheur' and how is it supposed to be fulfilled? What role is played by body and movement in space and time? How is power distributed, how is this noticeable, and where is the wiggle room in which change happens and where the dialectical relationship creates friction and takes shape?

I understand image as this multi-layered phenomenon that can be a material image, but that can also refer to a social image, an image or imaginary that people carry in their minds and bodies, a representation that guides much of what we do and think. Many social images (imaginaries) are indeed conveyed through material images such as photographs, illustrations, iconographies of social facts. And in our media-heavy communication culture, the image plays a predominant role. Other images are conveyed through the shape of the built environment, through the

buildings, streets, and landscape, through the arrangement of all those elements into a fabric in which we spend our lives. Moving in this fabric, our bodies also receive, convey and reproduce images of social values, hierarchies, perspectives and rules. This chapter will explore the notion of image in architecture, urban design and planning as it refers to the recent and growing phenomenon of walkable urbanism. It offers a look at theories and practices in order to understand current developments. It does not venture into policy recommendations or into suggesting a different or better walkable urbanism.

The geographer Denis Cosgrove offered an 'Iconography of Landscape' in which he and others analyzed early paintings of English landscapes in order to analyze the social structures creating those landscapes (Cosgrove 1988). Looking at walkable urbanism is a very similar endeavor. As such places are designed at computers with renderings illustrating the design ideas the process comes very close to that of the representation of a landscape in painting in early eras. Ultimately, the landscape, the built environment can be looked at as a compact design, a representation, an image. Notions such as 'moral geographies' try to grasp the fact that social values and norms are reflected in the geography of a society, in the built and landscaped environment of a culture. And built things are rarely ephemeral, they are here to stay, at least for a while, and so layers of cultural history are mixed into that image, making it even more dense for interpretation.

In an anthropological sense<sup>14</sup>, the notion of the image has a triple nature. One is to see pictures or buildings or behavior and read the images they convey as social imaginaries. Second, an image needs a medium that carries it (Belting 2011), this can be a picture, a statue, or a building. Images are also what we carry in our minds and bodies, images are social constructions that we incorporate. Third, the analysis of these social images can tell us a lot about the current social order we are looking at. Panofsky, most famous for his 'Studies in Iconology' made clear

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<sup>14</sup> I use anthropology in the European sense of a historic social science (very much in the tradition of Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu) and not in the narrow and colonial sense of an ethnology of exotic peoples.

parallels between iconography and ethnography, leaning on Cassirer's notion of 'symbolical values', in the sense that images write or reflect culture: "The discovery and interpretation of these 'symbolical values' (which are generally unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call 'iconography in a deeper sense': of a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis" (Panofsky, 1967, 8). Iconological analysis appears to be very close to the social anthropological spirit of understanding social phenomena not only in their social context but also in their anthropological genealogy. Cultural invariants or constants can have different forms in different times and places. Walking as a human invariant (the human body is made to walk) creates different forms and meanings of walking in different societies and different historical contexts. From a social fact or phenomenon ('fait social') such as walking we can also interpret more about the society in question, the form and meanings of walking can inform us about values and orders of that society. This is what Marcel Mauss termed the 'total social fact' ('fait social total') in his social anthropology (Mauss 1950). Considering walking as a total social fact leads to the study of images and imaginaries associated to this fact, images and imaginaries that co-construct the invariant walking into its current form. A total social fact not only allows us to understand how the social fact, walking, has become what it is, this genealogy can also reveal the power relations and the social order of a given place at a given time (if this is what the researcher is looking for) if the greater social context and the relevant fields (in a Bourdieusian sense, such as the economic field, the academic field) are taken into consideration. It is a total social fact, because, from it, one can study other dimensions of the society in question reflected in the social fact. This is why I am studying the context out of which walkable urbanism has emerged. An anthropological approach is also what is (albeit not explicitly) suggested by various authors who subscribe to an 'iconic' or 'pictorial' turn respectively (Boehm and Mitchell 2009) and problematize not only the rise of the image and the visual in our culture, but also try to establish a way to analyze both the images and the context of their production and consumption. To a certain extent, Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical image' corresponds to this

socio-historical-anthropological approach. An image – a street scene, a detail of a façade, an object, a building, a social moment, material or immaterial, captured in the observer’s mind just as a photograph – is analyzed through contextualizing it sociologically and historically, it is ‘telescoped’ through time (Benjamin 1999b; Buck-Morss 1986). Indeed, the architectural historic patchwork applied in the neo-traditional designs of walkable urbanism resembles an – albeit unintended, and therefore a-theoretical – ‘montage’ of dialectical images that await being telescoped and analyzed .

At a much more pragmatic level, yet, referring to the notion of image as being an important factor to reckon with, urban design and planning discourses have been operating with the iconic dimension for quite some time. The use of the notion of image is closely tied to Kevin Lynch’s work on the legibility and imageability of a city in an interest of enhancing the quality of life in a given city. His major work *The Image of the City* still provides scholars and practitioners guidelines for urban design (Lynch 1960). Recent handbooks and manuals on walkable urbanism, pedestrian and transit-oriented design and the like all feature concepts that Lynch introduced in the 1960s with a serious care for improving American cities by improving “the clarity or legibility of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern.” (Lynch, 1960, 2) Lynch offered both an analysis of existing cities in terms of their legibility and a perspective for rebuilding American cities as was most urgently felt in the 1960s – and felt again today for different reasons and on a different scale. He wanted to make the city a better place to live in by working on its ‘legibility’, a quality that enables the urban dweller to more easily recognize spatial functions and to find his/her way through the city. Lynch represents a new interest in the subjective perception and cognition of the city which can be understood to be part of a reaction to the modern renewal cities such as Jane Jacobs’ fight for bringing back the human scale and the affective to the city. Lynch assimilated trends of a new aesthetic of information and cognition in his work and thereby contributed to a form of aestheticization of urban design and planning that I have been describing. According to Historian Orit Halpern, Kevin Lynch contributed to establishing a

connection between the social sciences (here planning), an aesthetics of information and cognition (visualization), and systems theories (Halpern 2015). This supports my argument that a growing aestheticization and a parallel pragmatization of cognition has also found its ways into academic disciplines and influenced the creation and apperception of urban space beyond the academic.

In Lynch's psychological focus on the individual perception and cognition of the city dweller, and with early computational models in mind, he suggested to focus on the physical environment that constituted the essence of the urban visual environment, the urban images he described. Therefore he marked the following elements for his analysis of images, imageability and urban legibility: paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks and individual images. The trajectory of Lynch's contribution finds a bare-bones application in Reid Ewing's work which might also indicate the corroborating tendency of functionalist and behaviorist social sciences when applied in practical disciplines such as urban planning. In a recently published handbook on walkable urbanisms borrows from Lynch and has a panel of experts suggest some elements that define imageability and legibility: vernacular architecture, marquee signage, striking views, unusual topography, landmarks and Lynch's legibility elements. The description for imageability is clearly focused on physical appearance, yet is charged with affective qualities and 'meaning':

Imageability is the quality of a place that makes it distinct, recognizable, and memorable. A place has high imageability when specific physical elements and their arrangement capture attention, evoke feelings, and create a lasting impression. (Ewing & Bartholomew, 2013, 11)

This quest for imageability has a couple of strings attached to it. It is probably one of the main reasons why urban design and architecture in globalized capitalism have started to design in a context of commercial competition. Leslie Sklair points out the changed context of architectural production in globalized capitalism urging architects to create different, unique and outstanding buildings: 'iconic architecture' (Sklair 2006) or 'decotecture' (Boyer 1988) or 'architainment' (Saunders et al., 2005). The belief in the importance of such icons and the icons' photographic

presence in the media co-create the spectacular dimension of walkable urbanism. Visiting rather than living in these spaces, mediated by smart phones and the staging of one's being part of this spectacle, is what replaces the civic and political blood stream of a city with an IV flow of images and imaginaries of a dreaming walkable body. Christopher Leinberger, promoter and realtor of walkable urbanism calls for a "New American Dream" (Leinberger 2009). But the dream might be what Walter Benjamin referred to almost as the false consciousness created in capitalism's culture industry, a dream state we need to wake up from.

That dream state is constructed. And in an all too literal metaphor, urban design and planning co-construct the late capitalist dream state through walkable urbanisms' spaces of spectacle. I am discussing Kevin Lynch's method and its legacy because a method impacts the outcome of the research and the urban design that comes out of it. The further Lynch's method got passed on, the more its original contribution became concentrated around a behaviorist-empiricist model of the individual urban experience inside a set of urban material. Pushing Halpern's suggestion that Lynch proposed a new aesthetics of information and cognition further, I suggest that the *Image of the City's* legacy builds on an epistemological connection between the urban planning context in which Lynch proposed his method, the larger (postmodern) epistemological shifts happening at that time, and the effects on the walkable urbanism discourse today. That discourse is heavily focused on images and imageability of a place, and, as the highly codified urban walkable design of the New Urbanism shows, it also emphasizes the importance of defined urban material such as sidewalks, curbs, flower pots, architectural ornaments and so on. Moreover, that discourse and practice postulate behaviorist effects between such material and individuals postulating a given set of walkability imaginaries that need to be fulfilled by the design. Such imaginaries combine urban walking with consumptive activities such as sight seeing (the icons mentioned before), al-fresco dining, shopping and being entertained in the ice rink or the cinema. The requisite of legibility also posits the high dependency on conveying imaginaries so that the activities in a given space are defined and clear to the visitor. Indeed, such spaces treat people like visitors rather than as co-creators of the space.

When Lynch – and in his footsteps Reid and many more urban planners – agree to leave out the dimension of ‘meaning’ for practical reasons, as Lynch states, they factually devoid the built landscape of its social and cultural dimension. Urban space becomes a space in which behaviorist stimulus → response processes happen between the built environment and the visitors in that order. This model is deeply drenched in the methodological individualism that has dominated the social sciences in America to the detriment of a more contextual and political understanding of the built environment and its dialectical relation with the people who build, transform and move in them.

Lynch displaced concerns about what could not be recorded with an infinite faith in the study of subjective perception in and of itself as a tool. Rather than promoting an ideal or normative city, Lynch promoted the subjective space, a city built by means of the playback between individual memory and perception. Lynch put method ahead of end goals or idealized forms in the work of the planner. (Halpern, 2015, 121)

“What could not be recorded” refers to the dimension of ‘meaning’ which Lynch decided to neglect. The abandonment of vision and idealized forms of city planning as a reaction to certain modernist implementations and to urban renewal has led to a scattering of efforts to tackle what has helplessly been called “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber 1973). The issues of the complex world of postmodernity has been called this by the very lack of the option of creating a bigger vision, as these have been criticized for creating the evil modernist landscape in practice, or for being too theoretical in academia. Yet, while struggling with the little bits of the “wicked problems” one block at a time, the awareness might get lost that planning is actually corroborating the bigger vision of capitalism without knowing it.

An anthropological or sociological reading of the image of the city and its meanings, in contrast, allows to capture the crucially important social dimension of the built environment. It allows to understand the materiality in relationship to the imaginaries that run through a society in different times and places:

Architecture is a subject which demands to be understood in context: that is, within the context of its production (society, economics, politics, culture) and the context of its consumption, representation and interpretation (different academic disciplines, interest groups, institutions, users). (Rendell, Penner, & Borden, 2000, xi)

With such a sociology of architecture in mind the built environment can be read like Benjamin's dialectical image: historic elements become references for reinterpretation, today can be read differently in awareness of yesterday. The social dimension encompasses what (to a great extent) cannot be measured but theorized: the role and possibilities of people's activities in this environment and how they change, their movement, their access, the institutional, civic and commercial structure of the place, what kind of exchange is happening, private vs. public space, the role of walking, what kind of image is conveyed in that design, what kind of life and who's life is reflected in those images and designs, what dreams, what social imaginaries, what political structure?<sup>15</sup>

As this is written, one of the most recent publications for walkable urbanism that take the form of a hand-book for urban designers is Reid Ewing and Keith Bartholomew's 'Pedestrian- & Transit-Oriented Design'. Published by two major urban planning institutions, the Urban Land Institute and the American Planning Association, this book wants to contribute to set the standards for walkable urban design (Ewing and Bartholomew 2013). Probably with mainstream planners and street engineers in mind, Ewing stated in an interview: "I think it is going to be an eye-opener." (Ewing 2013) I suggest to look at this book in order to see what disciplinary heritage it is building on and what methodological approach it chooses, so that we might learn something about the design and practice of walkable urbanism it suggests to architects, designers and planners.

In particular, as this study focuses on the iconographic dimension, I would like to focus on one specific 'urban design quality' that is put forward among a set of qualities that are listed to be

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<sup>15</sup> Questions that can be problematized in terms of social categories like gender, race, class, etc.

added to the physical features that 'walking audit instruments' can measure. The 'conceptual framework' presented for this book's approach is made of the combination of 'physical features' (ranging from sidewalk width to building height and weather), 'urban design qualities' (such as imageability, legibility and human scale) to 'individual reactions' (like sense of safety, level of interest), going from 'more objective' to 'more subjective' features. The three groups determine the 'overall walkability', which, in turn, determines the 'walking behavior' (Ewing & Bartholomew, 2013, 11).

We have here the classic behaviorist scheme of stimulus → response. Somehow, in planning theory, despite the emphasis on behavior and behaviorism, George Herbert Mead's ideas about needing to consider the broader social group and the necessary intermediate of thought is often neglected. Moreover, the social sciences have come a long way to overcome such early sociological theorization that borrows from psychology, a development, however, that does not seem to have reached urban planning. It might be helpful to try and integrate the social dimension into planning theory's approaches when wanting to better understand the interactions between the built environment and people. Let's start with the force of images.

In 1960, Kevin Lynch published 'The Image of the City'. This book still is, up to today, urban planning theory's source in reference to the notion of image and its relation to the shaping of a city. Lynch made some very useful connections between form and meaning, and he also established a set of elements that constitute the images of a city, encompassing at the same time the viewpoint of the planner and of the person moving through the city. Reid Ewing and his co-authors take up those very elements as well as Lynch's approach for their 2013 handbook, and many other authors refer to Lynch's work still.

I would like to crystallize what kind of notion of 'image' Lynch established in this book and how, over time, this notion has developed into the current use of it in urban planning theory and practice. My hypothesis is that Lynch's focus on the physical elements constituting an image,

his understanding of the generation of meaning through images as purely relative and less important, might have benefits in terms of structural clarity of city planning, however, some of his methodological choices have favored the limitation of his ideas to a behaviorist and cause-and-effect reasoning that is restricting urban planning's understanding of the city through the decades since, as well as the understanding of walkable urbanism today. In particular, I would argue that the very fact of ignoring the element termed 'meaning' together with the cultural dimension has restrained the possibility of more fully understanding the socio-spatial dynamics of a city. Moreover, it has also discarded the option of interpreting the political dimension of city form and how it relates to the social as well as the economic dimension. Kevin Lynch's approach in 'Image of the City' was new at the time in the sense that it looked at something 'soft' like the image – a notion he never fully defines in the book –, however it happened and evolved in the following decades inside a field of social science and especially planning that has been very much limited to the quantitative, behaviorist, empiricist, positivist (you name it) methodologies. The seed of understanding that he had planted could have grown into more than what it became, rather than staying limited to the relation between physical environment and human behavior, it could have integrated the social and historical dimension into that relation, to get closer to what Edward Soja calls the triple dialectic between space, society and history (Soja 2010) and explore the potential for personal growth, social change and progressive design, as Lynch outlines in his work, especially since walkable urbanism presents itself as that rebellious force that counters the numb car-centered culture and industry. The question is to what extent the current images are themselves numbing and mainstreaming people into a very restricted understanding of walkable urbanism. To look at the image from an anthropological angle, then, might shed some more and broader light on this, as anthropology, in the tradition I use it here, tries to understand social facts in their historic and cultural dimensions. The anthropologist and art historian Hans Belting described this kind of approach in his introduction to the English translation of his 'An Anthropology of Images': "I do not use the term 'anthropology' in the sense of 'ethnology', but rather according to its European definitions, which needs some explanation.

In Europe the term has a broader meaning of a ‘cultural anthropology’, embracing the Kantian definition of a human being and of human nature in general.” (Belting, 2011, 2) Marcel Mauss’ concept of the ‘total social fact’, mentioned earlier, is helpful here too. In this approach, a social fact (walking, architecture) is understood as reflecting the society with its value systems, its hierarchies, its mode of production at a given time and place. Studying one fact reveals more from a society, while at the same time, the reference to a broader arch of social institutions helps reading the social fact in question to understand its social relevance and construction. In the case of the notion of ‘image’ this approach seems especially fruitful, since our definitions of image point to two dimensions at least: we refer to the image and mean the medium, this could be a photograph, a sculpture, a building that carries a mental image. The mental image is the other dimension, and it is probably not limited to the mental sphere. It is an amalgam of cultural heritage, social rules, and personal interpretations. It is close to the notion of social imaginary, those beliefs and representations a society collectively holds and that direct the thoughts and actions of its members, it ultimately also directs the very way things are seen, as summarized in Saussure’s phrase “Le point de vue crée l’objet” (the point of view creates the object). Hence, our social image of what walkable urbanism is determines how we approach a place. This not only allows one to analyze an utterly unwalkable place, it also shapes the possibilities of what a walkable place could look like and what one does in there, how such design organizes people in space, what people, what they do, when and how and what reward they take from it.

Lynch suggests to focus on the notion of image to understand the potential and the mechanisms of urban design and to help the task of ‘reshaping’ the city in the future. Walkable urbanism today is also attempting to reshape parts of the urban landscape. There are two spheres of his argument that appear a little vague if not contradictory, and I suggest to find out if this ambivalence has led planning theory, which has heavily leaned on Lynch’s work, to remain vague in those spheres, with consequences that are of some importance. Let’s first look at the basic ideas he suggests that are relevant to this study here.

At the center of his study stands the notion of image. Focusing on the image of cities Lynch describes how cities can be perceived by people, informing urban designers and planners: “This book will consider the visual quality of the American city by studying the mental image of that city which is held by its citizens.” He opens his book by an evaluation of American people’s perception (or image!) of cities that is quite telling about the decade during which this study was written:

A beautiful and delightful city environment is an oddity, some would say an impossibility. Not one American city larger than a village is of consistently fine quality, although a few towns have some pleasant fragments. It is hardly surprising, then, that most Americans have little idea of what it can mean to live in such an environment. They are clear enough about the ugliness of the world they live in, and they are quite vocal about the dirt, the smoke, the heat, and the congestion, the chaos and yet the monotony of it. But they are hardly aware of the potential value of harmonious surroundings, a world which they may have briefly glimpsed only as tourists or as escaped vacationers. They can have little sense of what a setting can mean in terms of daily delight, or as a continuous anchor for their lives, or as an extension of the meaningfulness and richness of the world. (Lynch, 1960, 2)

We might say that this particular view can be attributed to the 1960s in which American cities were being sensed as overcrowded even dangerous and ugly, but few people had travelled enough to know places to compare internationally. Mumford has called the big industrial cities an offense to the human senses. The post-war phase of housing development through the G.I. Bill was only recent history and more people wanted to move out into the newly constructed suburbs and have that new way of life of the new social dream called middle class, with the homeownership, the cars, the appliances, etc. that came with it. The images, in Lynch’s sense, were binary, either the ugly city or the quaint suburb which really was an industrial size agglomeration of similar cheap houses, yards and driveways, yet fed by an image of progress to have made it out of the city into this romantic illusion of a village. The people’s images, thus, were binary – city vs. suburbia – and deluded – image vs. ‘reality’. But Lynch’s image of the

people's image itself is a socially constructed thing, as is the planner's view on the general public's perception of urban landscape, how is this view continued until today and reflected in urban designers' approach to walkable urbanism? Here the dimension of the social imaginary comes in. What imaginaries are transported by urban design and planning? Structuring the urban landscape such that it is clear and 'legible' to the urban dweller, and empowering people by enabling them to have an 'environmental image' – "the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual" (4) – is one big goal of Lynch's argument. People need to be able to orient themselves, as "like any good framework, such a structure gives the individual a possibility of choice and a starting-point for the acquisition of further information. A clear image of the surroundings is thus a useful basis for individual growth." (4) Lynch continues with his empowering thoughts: "The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. He should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs. An environment which is ordered in precise and final detail may inhibit new patterns of activity [...] it indicates that what we seek is not a final but an open-ended order, capable of continuous further development." (6) It would be worthwhile reflecting on his recommendation to urban designers and planners. Walkable urbanism, today, markets itself as being on the peak of urban design, applauding their countering greedy developers' interests and mainstream planning, a design through which the individual person can move according to his or her human scale, enjoy the urban fabric and thereby contribute to a vivid urban life on Main Street – all empowering features as opposed to car-based and abandoned city-centers, for example. Given that the manuals for that kind of pedestrian-oriented urban design lean on Kevin Lynch's writings, they use his notions and concepts as very building blocks of their recommendations.

I mentioned two spheres in Lynch's writings earlier that are rather vague. One is the problem of meaning, the other is the relation between meaning and form. Can these considerations help us answer the above questions or understand their answers?

If it is our purpose to build cities for the enjoyment of vast numbers of people of widely diverse background – and cities which will also be adaptable to future purposes – we may even be wise to concentrate on the physical clarity of the image and to allow meaning to develop without our direct guidance. (Lynch 1960, 8)

This statement, on the one side reflects that meaning can be installed by authority, like in the set up of monuments or buildings that clearly represent power, on the other side the statement holds that meaning should be free-flowing, self-generated by people and ever changing. Both exist, obviously, but more obvious and less visible is the fact that meaning is created in urban design if you want it or not. It is similar to the common methodological misbelief that there could actually be such a thing as objective science, a wholly neutral and factual account of reality. Apart from the fact that reality is an elastic notion, any scientific approach has its epistemological roots and therefore its social and political inclination – even if the researcher isn't aware of it. So too, architecture and design grow out of a particular context. And even the postmodern context with its alleged freedom of grand narratives is woven into the social, political and economic fabric of its society.

With Lynch, meaning – admittedly an elastic term – is recognized to be potentially generated by design. It is thrown back to the individual though to generate meaning independently. It is not this leaving-it-open approach that is questionable, but rather, the ignoring of the fact that meaning IS generated through the design, through the physical structure, if you want it or not, and even a very specific one, so it'd better be problematized. The separation of meaning from form is a decision Lynch makes for the focus and scope of the book, as he does recognize that this separation might not stand up against deeper or further analysis:

So various are the individual meanings of a city, even while its form may be easily communicable, that it appears possible to separate meaning from form, at least in the early stages of analysis. This study will therefore concentrate on the identity and structure of city images. (Ibid. 9)

The problem then might not be Lynch's thought but rather how his work has been interpreted through the decades in planning theory, and how, specifically, it is taken up in the practical writings on walkable urbanism, e.g. Ewing's empiricist suggestion to 'measure the unmeasurable' in walkability issues (Ewing and Handy 2009). Furthermore, Lynch cannot fully hold up this separation in his flow of the argument, as at various points the very physical form and its relation to meaning is at the heart of what he is describing, which leads to some confusion. His definition of the environmental image points out three constitutive and interrelated elements, namely identity (objects as unique entities), structure (the object's spatial relation to the observer), and meaning ("whether practical or emotional" (Lynch 1960, 8)). Through their very interconnection in the construction of the concept of image, it is difficult to construct his theory when one element is left aside, as he suggests to do with the element meaning.

The source of this methodological confusion and consequential ambivalence in the argument might also lie in the specific appreciation of architecture and urban design in American culture. The focus in science as well as in common sense on the individual psychology, the individual taste and choices in a culture of methodological individualism widely determines the scope of the discussion of the socio-spatial dialectic. Indeed, it is rarely seen as a dialectic proper, but as how an individual, by free choice judges the urban landscape, how s/he creates that environmental image of a place by totally personal references of memory, taste and opinion. In contrast, a sociology of architecture looks at the cultural dimension of buildings and urban landscapes. The built environment is understood as reflecting history and society with all its aspects of financial flows, religious beliefs, power relations and the spatial organization of people and vice-versa. Architecture creates spaces for living (Lebensräume) and thus represents and reifies a society's spatial order of many societal aspects, ranging from hierarchy to technology, from gender relations to the sensorial capacities of people. This is the reason why many ethnological studies of foreign cultures include the study of dwellings and constructed things from houses and huts to furniture and fabrics (Lévi-Strauss 1955; Mauss 1950). And anthropological studies on the researcher's own or familiar turf do study architecture and the social organization of

space, too (Bachelard 1970; DeCerteau 1990; Foucault 1975; Engels 1973). It is not, then, as Lynch states, that “[o]nly powerful civilizations can begin to act on their total environment at a significant scale” (Lynch, 1960, 13). Rather, a historical and dialectical view of socio-spatial interaction shows that with settlement, the structures and features of a society are woven and built into its material manifestations, tools, furniture, houses, villages and neighborhoods:

Die konkrete Gestalt der Institutionen; das je spezifische Gesicht der sozialen Segmentierungen und Hierarchien, der Differenz der sozialen Milieus und der sozialen Funktionssysteme, des Naturverhältnisses: Dies alles wird durch die Architektur hergestellt; insbesondere in jener gesteigert ‘artifiziellen Gesellschaft’, in der wir uns zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts befinden. (Delitz, 2009, 16)

The important thing when trying to think the socio-spatial dialectic, is to actually keep it dialectical, interactive. Indeed, architecture and sociology are in a certain competition about which dimension, architecture or society, is more influential, and this disciplinary contest is part of the reason for the approach’s reticence. Therefore, Delitz, in her review or introduction to the sociology of architecture, adds, after a discussion of Foucault’s studies of prisons and asylums in ‘Discipline and Punish’ that in order to understand and distinguish societies we need to consider the entire socio-technical set-up of architectural thought rather than individual buildings or persons:

Es geht nicht um einzelne Gebäude, sondern um das ‘Dispositiv’ eines architektonischen Denkens. Und es geht nicht um eine Trennung von Sozialem und Artefakten, sondern um das ‘soziotechnische’ Konglomerat, nach dem sich die Gesellschaften differenzieren lassen.<sup>16</sup> (Delitz, 2009, 50)

With that said, the core concept Lynch creates for his study of the image of the city – ‘imageability’ – is gaining density:

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<sup>16</sup> Translation: It is not about singular buildings but rather about the ‘dispositive’ of the architectural thinking. And it is not through a separation of the social from artifacts, but rather through the ‘sociotechnical’ conglomerate that societies can be differentiated.

This study will look for physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image. This leads to the definition of what might be called 'imageability': that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. (Lynch, 1960, 9)

What is a strong image? What resources does it invoke to make it strong? Is he referring to feelings or a sense of orientation, to cultural patterns or rules of conduct? We don't know. Lynch refers to the complexity of the image, invoking both emotions and thought, memories and reason, however, by leaving it so 'complex', it is hard to get any traction in the question of the role of the image in the dialectic between the built environment and people. That openness leads, ultimately, to the restricted definition of imageability that we find in manuals for walkable urbanism. Ewing's handbook, for instance, starts out by defining the necessary 'urban design qualities' that 'pedestrian- and transit-oriented design' should endorse. The very first of these qualities, by clear reference to Kevin Lynch, is 'imageability'. He summarizes this quality as follows:

Imageability is the quality of a place that makes it distinct, recognizable, and memorable. A place has high imageability when specific physical elements and their arrangement capture attention, evoke feelings, and create a lasting impression. (Ewing & Bartholomew, 2013, 11)

Doesn't this sound like a text from a travel brochure? These qualities were compiled by a "panel of experts" who associated several terms to the quality of imageability: landmark, sense of place, physical and psychological well-being, vernacular architecture, striking views, unusual topography and... 'marquee signage'. Ewing adds Jan Gehl's reference to Italian city squares as the perfect outdoor experience. Twice removed, from Denmark to Italy to the USA, we are again reminded of the travel brochure.

From Lynch's initial description of the average American's hostile image of the city without, in turn, any clear image of what a good city could be, to contemporary walkable urbanism's determined image of what the image of a walkable urban design should feature and create, we

witness a shift from the dichotomy of industrial city vs. suburb, or ugly monotony, to what might be called a culture of experience or simply (and still) a culture of spectacle.

Walkable urbanism creates images and imaginaries of sustainability, community, and a certain life-style, however, its essence, in its somewhat romantic<sup>17</sup>, aestheticized and abstracted character, is similar to the industrial era's bucolic image of life outside of the city. The images of walkable urbanism, the ones reflected in the renderings of urban designers and planners, the ones building up in the public's heads, the ones talked about in the planning theory, real estate and journalistic discourses all refer to a spectacular, safe, entertaining, socially reconfirming leisure park that does not have much to do with civic urban life which is so often referred to in the discourse but not implemented in images or the social use of walkable urban space – the notorious Italian piazza or the Ramblas in Barcelona as a reference of urban life in walkable urbanism is seen and adapted from a tourist's perspective. Walkable urbanism's desire to overcome suburbia hasn't overcome the social images of idealized dwelling in America and therefore is, in its essence, still very similar to what Paul L. Knox has termed 'vulgaria' (Knox 2005a) – vulgaria at a very high level of social distinction. Even if we leave out New Urbanism's concentrated forms, in essence gated communities, the various downtown revitalizing initiatives that are infused with the premises of walkable urbanism show how the images of that kind of spatial organization of people and activities have slowly gained ground in America. Leinberger's 'New American Dream'. As gratifying as the shift away from car-centered thinking can be, the new discourse and practice of walkable urbanism shows too many signs of recuperation by this society's underlying power relations that are driven by the interests of capital and certain professions. The apparently progressive image of sustainability that is brought forward by this discourse, with Jeff Speck leading the way (Speck 2012), needs to be read against the backdrop of the strong social, political and especially economic forces. It also needs to be read in the

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<sup>17</sup> Remnant's of Reckwitz' romantic aesthetic subject from the beginning of modern aestheticization, discussed earlier, contributing to the amalgam of the aesthetic postmodern subject and imaginaries present in walkable urbanism.

context of the predominant methodological individualism in America with its empirical and behaviorist framework. Indeed, Lynch's empirical focus on form and his psychological focus on behavior (Halpern 2015) together with the problematic evolution of this methodological decision into the discourse and practice of urban design and planning is exemplary for the kind of insight made possible by behaviorist approaches. The social context is ignored, behavior is not understood culturally, the power relations that drive social change (including change in the built environment) cannot be understood in that way. I argue that this kind of understanding is important for political agency. All the more since some representatives of walkable urbanism refer to the liberating aspect of walkable urbanism, liberating from the rule of the car and enabling social interaction and strengthening social cohesion. Some authors have found such claims unfulfilled (duToit et al. 2007). If there ever was a struggle for more agency it has been co-opted by capital's interests. Transportation planning tries to understand people's choices. Some authors doubt that people's mode of transportation choice depends so much on the built environment as Lynch and others propose (Cervero 2002). But their search, as well, takes place in the dimension of individual preferences – again, a methodological individualism and behaviorism that limits the scope of understanding of a deeply social phenomenon.

This is the world of rational scientific management; the world of the value-free and uncritical planner rationally applying unbiased facts – the only one truth – to instrumentally ascertain the best means to the preordained end. (Gunder, 2010, 301)

I suggest a different theoretical framework which takes into stronger account the societal dimension<sup>18</sup>. Walkable urbanism is – despite all the benefits of having people think about walking as transportation – yet another spatial fix with societal consequences in which capital conquers city space for new markets and infiltrates urban civic structures by commodifying them. Hence,

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that I suggest a framework for transportation planning. Mine is a broader sociological picture drawn with the hope of contributing to understanding some of the logic of late capitalism at work in aestheticized forms of walking.

the socio-economic dimension must be taken into much bigger consideration in order to understand the phenomenon of walkable urbanism.

From highly practical and empirical research to the more discursive and legitimizing<sup>19</sup> writings of practitioners and scholars in the field of walkable urbanism they all contribute to cement the inherently aestheticized and commodified character of walkable urbanism. Ultimately, the writings of various people and institutions who support the walkable and sustainable idea for many good reasons further contribute to the life-style trend of walkable urbanism and the related and expensive real estate market, driven by the dynamics of the commodified postmodern aesthetic subject. Reviewing some of walkable urbanism's strongest implementers, new urbanist design and culture, Paul L. Knox comes straight to the point:

Embarrassing displays of intellectual obedience from many design professionals, along with the efforts of enthusiastic journalists such as James Kunstler, have contributed a good deal of solemn nonsense to a Panglossian, slavishly hagiographic, and shamelessly self-referential literature that is characterized by naïve architectural determinism and a marvelous elasticity of thinking. The cumulative effect is a consensual hallucination that has done more for marketing copywriters than for genuinely progressive urban design. Form, after all, follows finance. (Knox, 2005, 42)

The fact that form follows finance is part of walkable urbanism's critique towards developer built subdivisions of the same old sprawling beige and grey little houses (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000), or of the increasing obsolescence of buildings (Weber, 2002, who is not a New Urbanist). However, as Jameson pointed out:

Architecture [and urban design] is, however, of all the arts that closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship: it will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture

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<sup>19</sup> For new urbanists' very own contextualization of the phenomenon read: 'New Urbanism and American Planning, The Conflict of Cultures' (Talen 2005) and don't miss Duany's introduction for his "proper" contextualization of this book.

grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it. (Jameson, 1984, 56-57)

Granted, postmodern architecture is said to be passé. The urban design of walkable urbanism, however, is still to be understood in the genealogy of postmodern architecture, or rather, architecture in postmodernity. The new urbanist principle of vernacular design, then, is more often implemented in a mixture of an image of the vernacular walkable urbanism and the economic possibilities of the involved parties, as Sonia Hirt has shown in the example of Cleveland, where the revitalization of a neighborhood on the premises of mixed use, complexity and walkability showed a very restricted architectural reality of few alternating floor plans and many fake and allusive elements:

The projects are fitting examples of Fordist, mass-produced urbanism even if they are designed not to look like it. Their designers struggled to make them look premodern: give the repetitive floor layouts different facades, mandate the stylistic diversity, and make ready-made streetscapes yet evoke the succession of architectural styles that in times past would have been built over many decades. The projects are then modernist frames made to look almost pluralist, almost mixed-use, almost pedestrian, and almost premodern. (Hirt, 2009, 267)

One can deduce from here, that the walking options are ready-made and rather restricted as well. Will there be transgressions of these restrictions? Will such walking transgressions – often referred to the Situationist *dérive* and the *détournement* by urban geographers and artists – make a difference in the bigger societal picture? Maybe gradually, maybe they are part and parcel of the postmodern commodified aesthetic subject acting in the society of late capitalism. The logic of late capitalism is often summarized under the ideology of neo-liberalism. But there is more. And, in particular, as Michael Gunder – via Foucault, Marcuse, and Žižek – points out, ideology, and therefore agency, need to be understood in a more complex way. Our submission to an ideology today, indeed our participation in it, is not the devotion to whatever it suggests as Cause, rather it is closely linked to the contemporary, he calls it neo-liberal, dictum of enjoyment (Gunder, 2010, 306-307). This is, after all, very close if not similar to the Frankfurt School's

theory of the culture industry put forth in this dissertation, exercising that suave repression which keeps people just happy enough (with the illusion of being able to become happier) so that they won't rebel but actually buy in to the logic of capitalism which organizes more and more aspects of life.

In this regard, there appears to be a delusional dimension to walkable urbanism and it is exactly that principle of enjoyment that furthers the buy-in to the spatial forms of capitalism we live in. On the one hand it appears to be this progressive, liberating design movement to create places of a human scale in which people instead of cars move and meet: to promote human agency. On the other hand the design we are seeing implemented reflects a society of spectacle, consumption, exclusive social distinction and serialization and thereby cementation of these characteristics of capitalism.

As an example, the often referred to Italian piazza might be part of the inspiration that designs those places, but the reality shows none of its civic activities, only entertainment, consumption and reproduction. It is the civic activities, though, that would carry more space and potential for agency.



Piazza San Marco, as recreated for The Venetian, Hotel in Las Vegas.

© Richard Grant, 2014 [fair use]

From: Richard Grant, "A European Weekend in the Desert of Las Vegas," *Walking and Drinking Beer – Walking Tours Around the World with Occasional Pub, Tavern, Bar, Saloon and Cafe Stops* (blog), March 8, 2014, [walkinganddrinkingbeer.blogspot.com/2014/03/a-european-weekend-in-desert-of-las.html](http://walkinganddrinkingbeer.blogspot.com/2014/03/a-european-weekend-in-desert-of-las.html)



Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans by Architect Charles Moore, created in the 1970s, and clearly a postmodern architecture of the past, yet exemplary for its (almost text-book-like) historical fragmentation that we can observe in less obvious form in more recent architecture of walkable urbanism.

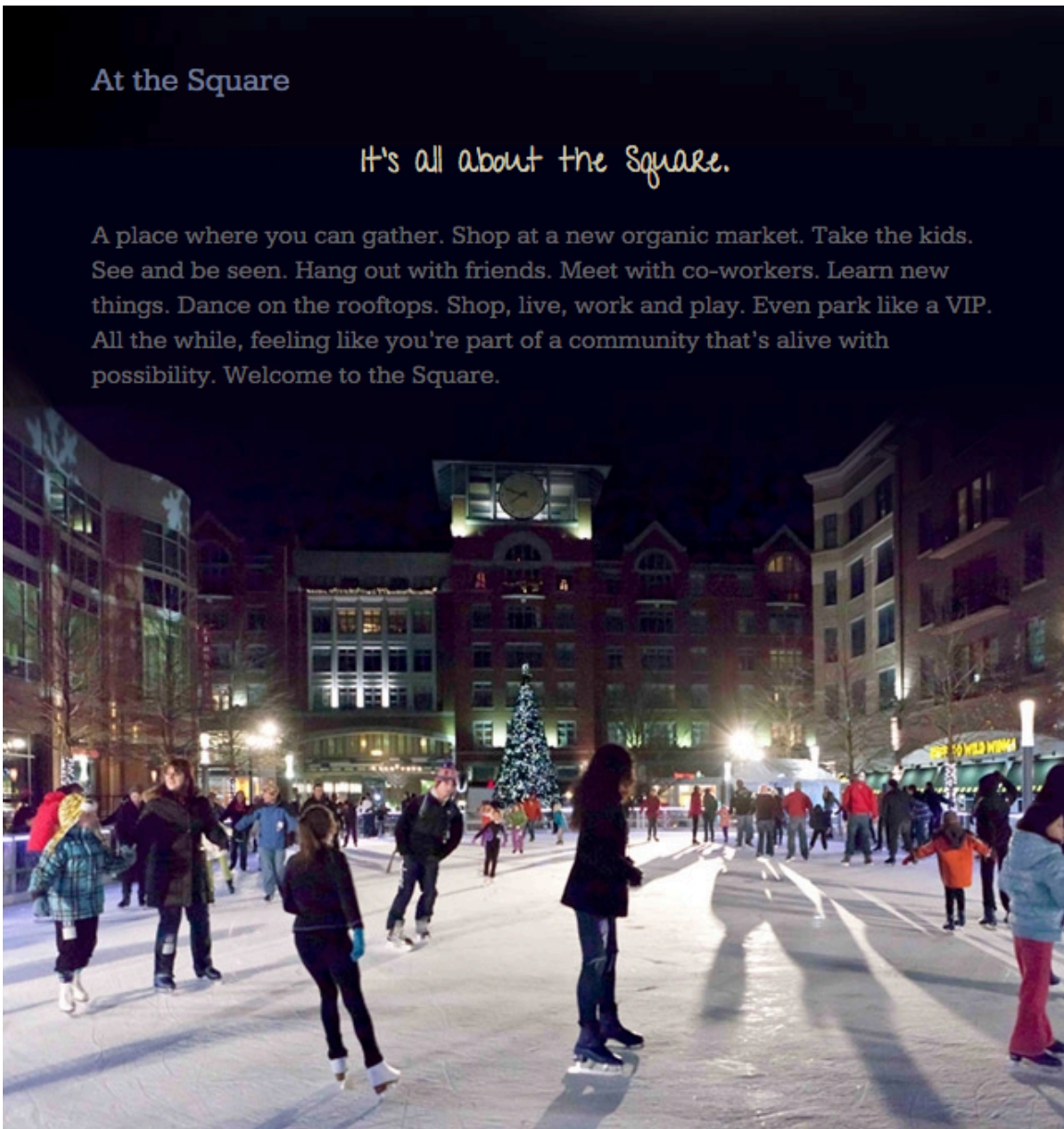
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The Italian piazza is an inspiration for walkable urbanism and finds its translation in the design of plazas and squares. One of the handbooks of New Urbanism, *The Lexicon of New Urbanism*, defines a square and alternatively a plaza as follows:

Square: A Civic Space type, typically located at an intersection of important streets, that is designed for unstructured recreation and Civic purposes. The Square is spatially defined by building Frontages and consists of Paths, lawns, and trees, formally disposed.

Plaza: a Civic Space type designed for Civic purposes and Commercial activities in the more urban Transect Zones, generally paved and spatially defined by building Frontages. Parking lots should be designed as plazas with the paving not as marked or detailed as typical parking lots. (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 2014)

In most walkable urban design, however, the “civic purposes” appear to be reduced to shopping, dancing, hang out or live, work, play. These actions are recreational, the civic component is absent, life in the city as suggested here is de-politicized. We are back to the short trip to Venice (or Las Vegas).



Rockville Town Square "At the Square" Ad says: "It's all about the Square. A place where you can gather. Shop at a new organic market. Take the kids. See and be seen. Hang out with friends. Meet with co-workers. Learn new things. Dance on the rooftops. Shop, live, work and play. Even park like a VIP. All the while, feeling like you're part of a community that's alive with possibility. Welcome to the Square." In other words, you cannot be part of that community, because it does not exist. But you can pretend for a while in this square if you buy a parking and an ice rink ticket. From: "At the Square", *Rockville Town Square*, accessed August 2015, [rockvilletownsquare.com/at-the-square](http://rockvilletownsquare.com/at-the-square) [fair use]

In iconological terms, the images of ads – as cities more and more advertise their "image" in a quest for place-making and attraction of new inhabitants, tourists, investors and tax payers –

and the images of urban design are telling on various levels, such as architecture, urbanism, spatial organization, historic phases and administrative rule. I emphasize their societal dimension and what it tells us about the social order as it unfolds in these spaces. As the first iconographies and iconologies of the Renaissance suggested, we need to read the symbols in the images. These do not have to be particular symbols such as a cross, a lion, or an obelisk. Symbolic value is also expressed in the arrangement of buildings, the set up of urban fabric, the slogans attached, the way people are portrayed. We can practice a 'deeper iconography' and read the 'symbolic values' that are conveyed, the social order that is represented through their arrangement. What started as an interpretation of paintings, can be continued for photographic and video images. In this case the term media literacy is often used, a literacy that is made of a knowledge of the existing media, the culture industry, and the capacity of reading more than one dimension in images. It is similar to reading between the lines. But this has become more difficult in a society that has devoted itself to one-dimensionality, even in the form of postmodern relativity of the image as text. Hence, the image is highly political as carrier of imaginaries. For social (political) influence it is important to contribute to constructing images to reproduce or introduce imaginaries. The built environment can also be read as an image, the image that the different buildings and spaces create together in their specific setting. The arrangements in walkable urbanism convey an image of life in an almost unreal, often anachronistic setting. The predominant image seen in walkable urbanism reflects social imaginaries of the American pursuit of happiness, imaginaries of ideals and idols, of hierarchies and steady states, of human-nature relations, of human scale and ideas of progress, and so forth... images and imaginaries that, read within a theoretical framework, inform us about the society in question. Knowing more about dominant imaginaries and how they are conveyed allows us to think beyond them and to find the wiggle room for new objective (collective) and subjective thought and action to happen.

## Depolitization through Commodified Aestheticization

The degree of spectacle in walkable urbanism's iconography is a point I would like to emphasize as it somehow shifts the image's interpretation. The more important the image and the taking of images becomes in our society, the more it is not only important to read the images but also the 'bigger picture' of the technology with which we make images and of the people involved in producing a picture in front and behind the lens (taking the picture, posing for a picture, publishing a picture), a development already captured by Walter Benjamin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the popularization of photography (Benjamin 1972; Benjamin 1969). Guy Debord famously stated that the fabric of the society of spectacle he describes is represented by the spectacular: "The spectacular is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images." (Debord, 2004, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraphe)

In *The Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord analyzed the further development of Marx's observation that in the capitalist mode of production material relations become social and social relations become material. A sociological study, Debord's work on the advent of a society guided by the image, by the spectacle, problematized the mediated kind of social relation between persons that is at the heart of this society. Debord's work and the Situationist movement are referred to by many authors' writings about the spectacular dimension of our society and culture. He verbalized a problem that needed to be pointed out and, as this process is still going on, is in need of continuing analysis, as the internet presents us with a new form of the spectacle and new corresponding social relations, and as the aesthetisation of society has created a relative overemphasis of the visual in which communication through images has almost become a must, and in which the simulacrum – despite the steel and concrete of a simulacrum building – is nothing but an image. Various authors have approached the problem of the spectacular from different angles, contributing to a broad critique of capitalist society and culture.

At the same time, in a critique of the spectacular, the 1968 student movements had been criticized for their aestheticization and spectacle. Already Walter Benjamin called to attention the difference between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of art (Benjamin 1977).

[...[image](#)...]

Graffito at the Sorbonne: Cache-toi, objet! (The other one says, "Baisse-toi et broute!")  
© Claude Dityvon, 1968 [fair use]  
[chambrenoire.com/claude-dityvon/mai68/dityvon000049.jpg-photo.html](http://chambrenoire.com/claude-dityvon/mai68/dityvon000049.jpg-photo.html)

A graffito appeared in 1968 on the walls of the Sorbonne University in Paris reading: "Cache-toi, objet!" (Hide, object!) In an endeavor to guard the everyday object from its commodification its presence was equally made omnipresent through writing the word on the wall. Much earlier, in the first half of the twentieth century, Duchamps' Ready Made pieces represented an early way of pointing out the commodification of the everyday and its objects' use-value – as well as the commodification of art itself. Some scholars interpret the "Cache-toi, objet!" graffito as representative of the postmodern coming of the focus on the everyday and the commodification of everything (as in everyday objects) (Keller 1979). Others simply interpret such graffiti – especially in combination with the "Baisse-toi et broute!" graffito as a guerilla action of anarchist groups in order to undermine any form of authority both inside and outside of the movement. The Situationists used a photo of the graffito from a different angle and 'detourned' the photograph, turned it 90 degrees in an act of undermining the force of photographic images: "The act of détournement exposes how the value and significance of photographs can, like the palimpsest character of graffiti, be metaphorically whitewashed, re-coded and even erased." (Stracey, 2014, 93) Yet others allude to the Sartrean tension between subject and object the reader is lead to the new uncertainty: is s/he a subject looking at an object, is it inanimate or animate, or is s/he even an objectified subject, or a subject thanks to objects that determine

class and gender and more refined social distinctions? In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the object has gained a fantastic presence and importance in the social fabric:

“Il est bien vrai qu'à force de se précipiter par la masse, les rapports du Sujet et de l'Objet finissent par se vivre dans l'exhibition collective et par risquer de voir s'inverser leur genèse ; ce n'est parfois plus le Sujet qui fait l'Objet mais l'Objet qui se substitue au Sujet : les lunettes à l'intellectuel, la pipe au dilettante, le frigidaire au bourgeois, la bibliothèque au lettré...” (Morin, 1969, 131)

The Sartrean subject/object relation triggered by the “Cache-toi objet” graffito is not only about the postmodern human/non-human relation. In this case it helps us think about the subjectivation and the objectivation that people are able to perform and how it places them in society, how it affects their agency. Much of the Frankfurt School's work is based on the analysis of Nazi barbarism's dialectic and oppressive use of individualization on the one side and the equalizing forces of the masses on the other side as part of their gigantic communication strategy. The politics of images very much work on these psycho-socio-political premises. The iconographical dimension of society needs to be read with the political subtext in mind – even in less dictatorial stages and places.

From Walter Benjamin's thoughts on photography in the early twentieth century to the Situationists's détournements to Neill Leach's *Anaesthetics of Architecture* (Leach 1999), there has always been a critical analysis of the iconographic and aesthetic dimension of art, science, and society. My approach to reading society through images and imaginaries, to reading walkable urbanism via its design sketches and renderings and via its concrete manifestations and advertisements for them, suggests a reading of the social power relations which underlie walkable urban design. Further, the dialectical movements of aestheticization and commodification make the need for critical iconology urgent because of the very interlacing of aestheticization and capitalism. The aesthetic dimension here can be misleading and is often interpreted as art and creativity, but in the realm of walkable urbanism, even when combined with arts-led economic redevelopment strategies, the aesthetic is essentially commodified.

There is nothing to be criticized about bringing places back onto the map and having people participate in making a living. But it is the inherently capitalist logic that further alienates people from what art could actually offer: agency through insight. What are the principles of a society which produces such spectacular walkable urban design? Reading the transparent ink of history and politics embedded in any social phenomenon is the main focus of understanding how social facts and phenomena have become what they are. Benjamin's notion of 'dialectical image' which evoke the fruitful clash of times and spaces can be applied in the case of neo-traditional walkable urbanism with its historically inspired codification of urban design and architecture. Refrabrications of historical architecture, various kinds, epochs, and adaptations intermixed but yet not real, not gradually come together. How can we read these built environments by telescoping them through history, through time and space? The pronounced historic reference in urban design and architecture is a trait of postmodernity. Not that architecture and urban design before that were without historic reference. But the postmodern use of historic reference needs to be understood in the specific context of postmodernity. Frederic Jameson has problematized the relative a-historicity of postmodern thought: Postmodern discourses of the end of this or that, or of the arrival of the new society of this than the other need to be looked at that way. Indeed, as he pointed out,

[s]uch theories have the obvious ideological mission of demonstrating, to their own relief, that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle. (Jameson, 1984, 55)

We might not be at the end of grand narratives. The erasure of our historical memory, the capacity of seeing contemporary phenomena in their relation to their genealogy blissfully ignores that "every position on postmodernism in culture — whether apologia or stigmatization — is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (Jameson, 1984, 55). In this setting, it becomes more difficult to establish a 'dialectical image'. The metaphorical telescoping through time and the

insights drawn from oscillating between contexts requires the user of the telescope to have some sort of historical and sociological understanding. Yet, in the context of postmodern relativism and a-historicity everything is possible. And to continue in Jameson's thoughts on the contemporary, most things are 'pastiche' in the first place, their self-referentiality offers no insight whatsoever, since they have been wiped clean of any historic reference, if not in the objects or phenomena themselves, then in the minds of the people who live with them or even write about them "with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and 'spectacles' (the term of the Situationists). It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato's conception of the 'simulacrum' — the identical copy for which no original has ever existed." (Jameson, 1984, 66) Clearly, The Venetian Hotel presented earlier is an obvious example of such a simulacrum. But what of the new town plaza with its 'high imageability' meaning "distinctive, recognizable and memorable" (Ameli et al. 2015)?

It appears that there are different understandings of the potential of the historic reference in urban design and planning. In other words, the term historic is used in various ways by different schools of thought or simply in the current vocabularies. I am touching this subject because it seems to be of relevance to distinguish certain assumptions at work in the uses of the term and its forms in order to understand the specificity of postmodernity's relation to history. Indeed, much of walkable urbanism's discourse relies on referencing historic and vernacular architecture and a combination of imaginaries that surround them and that signify a mixture of pre-modern and modern walkable life styles. Frederic Jameson, in his seminal essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (Jameson 1984), tackles the description and problematisation of what is reconciled under the notion of postmodernism across the academic disciplines and across the cultural phenomena. Most notably, his thoughts on history, or indeed a-history, as described above are useful for moving forward the argument of this study.

The point I would like to make here is that this very a-history, this loss of historic thinking and knowledge, leads to a reference to history that ontologically stabilizes constructions of historic imaginaries including their political and cultural regimes. Walkable urbanism, then, especially New Urbanist developments with their strict codes and rules of construction create a specific aestheticized historic reference that cements a contemporary-retrospective interpretation of architectural and dwelling history that is alienating both from history and the present: “The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time.” (Jameson, 1984, 66) It contributes as such to the construction of spectacular, fantasy-like housing developments and ultimately life-styles. Nan Ellin, in her book *Postmodern Urbanism*, gives an extensive overview of the various architectural and socio-economic dynamics that led into and through postmodern urbanism (Ellin 1999). It becomes clear that there are different relations to history. At first sight, there are, in stark simplification, the ones who are into historical preservation and vernacular, and the ones who celebrate a certain historic eclecticism. Both camps have created contradicting trends. Interestingly, though, a combination of both emerged due to a lack of historical knowledge, historical heritage, and the economic logic of real estate development in which form follows finance (Weber 2002; Willis 1995). Usually invoked for the shape of high-rises or subdivisions, form follows finance is also true for allegedly diverse and historic construction and renovation.

Nan Ellin points out how the New Urbanism, known for their sustainability and walkability principles, is to be understood in the genealogy of postmodern historic preservation movements, and more specifically, as the US branch of neorational urbanism which, in Europe, built on essentially urban forms and their symbolism and effect on people (a piazza, stairs, pillars all have their urban, civic meaning and sort of vibrate this meaning and thereby influence people’s behavior in this space, ideally to walk, mingle and socially interact) (Ellin 1999). As Ellin hints at, and as Michael Southworth further develops in his study of walkable urbanism (Southworth 1997), the New Urbanism’s ‘instant communities’ and ‘instant identities’ don’t work as planned, since they lack the depth of historical reference both in their less academic architecture and in

the people's knowledge and practice – or urban skills – compared to Europe. Moreover, as Ellin points out, one could call it historic invention rather than preservation, since the historic quotes are mixed and matched rather deliberately. They all refer to an idealized image of the past:

“Though extensively ‘preserving’ the past, the undertakings of preservationists and gentrifiers alike may be more accurately described as rewriting or inventing the past since buildings and districts are ‘renovated’, ‘restored’, or ‘rehabilitated’ to correspond to ideal visions of the past and to satisfy contemporary needs and tastes” (Ellin, 1999, 82-83).

Further, it needs to be analyzed what political structure underlies that image. The alleged a-political character of postmodern new urban architecture is rather political in the suggestion of community and access to that community, hence, its discourse is de-politicizing. This brings us back to Jameson's essay on the logic of ‘late capitalism’ that every statement on and of postmodernism needs to be interpreted in its political dimension, since after market capitalism, and after imperialism we are now in the stage of multinational or consumer capitalism which is “if anything, a purer stage of capitalism than any of the moments that preceded it.” (Jameson, 1984, 55) The argument Jameson sustains, therefore, is that this stage's logic penetrates most of our life, all its socio-economic, cultural, religious, aesthetic dimensions.

It is in this vigilant sense, that writings on the complexity and plurality of contemporary society should be analyzed for their epistemological, methodological and therefore political dimensions. As mentioned earlier in connection with my discussion of Kevin Lynch's legacy, in urban planning, that alleged complexity was given the name ‘wicked problems’ by two authors who greatly influenced the intellectual and practical strength of urban planning, reducing planning to a field suddenly rid of its resources (Rittel and Webber 1973). It should be hoped that the academic profession exists because neither problems nor images (or imaginaries) are so ‘wicked’ that they cannot be approached. The first duty should be to try and understand them properly. And therefore, again, we need to know how things have become what they are, rather than adhering to the mainstream canon and the economy-driven solutions. This path to understanding also

requires the problematisation or theorization of the phenomena, since the behaviorist models generally applied in urban design and planning most definitely must conclude that the world is utterly complex and wicked indeed. This leads us back to the methodological legacy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour. Their concentration on the visual in combination with the predominant methodological individualism of the Anglo-Saxon (social science and cultural) tradition is perpetuated in contemporary urban design and planning practice and theory. Neighboring disciplines also follow suit as described earlier. If not a pioneering, then it was at least an exemplary work towards further interlacing the aestheticization process with the commodification process in which capital continuously seeks to conquer new social and geographic spaces in order to establish new markets. Venturi's emphasis on individual taste in his argument mirrors the issues coming out of methodological individualism, a cultural predilection which furthers the development of the postmodern aesthetic subject as homo oeconomicus with its allegedly subjective needs and desires that can be fulfilled through the market. I will talk a little more about individual taste and choice below.

### *Walking Isn't Just Good for You, or the Walkable Aporia*

Venturi's argument for the preference for individual taste ignores where that taste comes from and what it does in terms of policing the configuration of people in space and in the economic order. Such an affirmative approach corroborates social hierarchy in combination with the legitimation of wasteful building techniques and life styles, as if the alleged 'individual' taste could be set apart from the bigger and more powerful underlying logic of late capitalism with its middle class illusion of social mobility, with its contorted notion of freedom, with its perpetual hunt for new markets and the shifting spatial and other fixes of capital (David Harvey 2001; Peck 2007). The same approach with its one-dimensional use of images and imaginaries close to the behaviorist principles that are used in advertising, lives on in contemporary urban design and

planning – which is, after all, very much entangled with the real estate market and its logic of selling space and life style. In his problematisation of planning as the left hand of neo-liberal economy, Michael Gunder criticizes the prescriptive character of planning discourse and interventions as corroborating the entertainment culture which, after all, serves as the alienating make-up of capitalism's interest:

Further, planning acts as a key state apparatus in facilitating this ideological task by harmoniously articulating how populations should enjoyably use their settlements, spaces and environments when seeking a better future. (Gunder, 2010, 306)

Urban design and planning has come a long way in promoting what are called more 'sustainable' life styles by producing a discourse of 'sustainability', 'smart growth', and 'walkability'. And it is encouraging to see how these considerations for the health of the environment and of humans are gaining some publicity. Re-thinking the car-centered urbanism (and sub-urbanism) has become the task of many alert planners but they are facing a widespread and cemented fabric of roads and sub-divisions that have wounded the land – in fact, looking down on much of the built environment from a plane, the cul-de-sacs and slightly bent roads with the regular offshoot of a driveway and house in the various sub-divisions look like a cobweb of scars that forever leave their wasteful mark on the land. However, the trend for more sustainable and especially for more walkable urbanism deserves a closer look, so that, beyond the simple reaction of welcoming such an apparently friendly and self-declared "smart" approach (Duany and Speck 2010), we understand what is going on by contextualizing this discourse and practice and revealing its underlying logic.

Walkable urbanism is a temporary fix that capital pushes for in its quest for new markets. Yet it is consequential in its architectural materiality and also in its social effects. It is a 'spatial fix' with cultural effects, just as the spatial fix of suburbia had cultural effects on phenomena as varied as gender roles, transportation planning, nutrition, public space, social interaction and so on. The shy rebellious force that stands up against the dominant car-centered culture is recuperated by

being integrated into a new culture of consumption. Two birds are killed with one stone by developing this new spatial fix – walkable urbanism – and by adapting the suave repression necessary for this through the channels of culture and life-style. And further, the images and imaginaries of walkable urbanism work directly in the court of the aesthetisation of space and the alleged individualization of taste and of architectural and life style choices – first and foremost by the middle classes. A pseudo reference to bohemian neighborhoods in Europe or in New York City interacts with the aesthetisation of society which some authors see as an inherent process within capitalism (Reckwitz 2012a; T. W. Adorno 1991a; Boyer 1988; Knox 1993), thereby building an image of a creative life in walkable neighborhoods that feeds the human yearning for creativity and aestheticization – only to leave it unsatisfied. In terms of class and social hierarchy, the images of walkable urbanism work on the premise of taste and social distinction – that is the need to reconfirm one’s social status –out of fear of socially falling down that illusive ladder of social mobility (Ehrenreich 1990). Christopher Leinberger, in a flash of sociological insight and of how to co-opt this trend for the real estate market offered a perfect formulation in the New York Times: “Walking isn’t just good for you. It has become an indicator of your socioeconomic status”... (Leinberger 2012) ...which you can show off by living in such a place.

It is even more complex a phenomenon as it works both on the simple premises of freedom of choice and taste in combination with social distinction, but also on the premise of integrating a whole new discourse on health and more importantly on environmental responsibility or at least environmental friendliness. The latter, in certain cases, lies closer to green washing one’s consciousness or simply participating in a trend one can buy (and thereby confirm one’s social status). Latest inquiries on the life in walkable neighborhoods show that people who bought a house in a walkable neighborhood do not necessarily walk more (Qiu 2013). Rather, they bring their suburban culture into the city with no interest in actually co-creating their new place other than in the way they are already used to. The serialization of walkable urbanism makes it a

commodity to pick as any other status-giving commodity with no other implication than opening your purse.

While Venturi's legacy is filled with images and the correspondent imaginaries of the aesthetics of Las Vegas and a mocking postmodern architecture, walkable urbanism as well has its own aestheticized iconography of watercolor sketches and strictly coded design standards and the social imaginaries that come with them. But beyond the pretty illustrations of ideal walkable urban places look very much the same everywhere from Texas to Maine all the way back to Scotland (The New Urbanist bureau of Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Co., both European emigrants, also conceptualizes historically aestheticized places in the Old World), the new spaces of walkable living, working, playing co-create imaginaries of an ideal but unreal society. What kind of life do these images call for? What kind of geographical and social space do they promote and create? What kind of social imaginaries are woven into these images and buildings? And how does this inform people's actions? In 1988 Christine Boyer observed the return of 'the aesthetic' and – through a technological analogy – its implementation in ever same series:

To play on the analogy further, this recursive mentality is serial. Mass production is serial so it is not surprising to find the mass production of city spaces in late capitalism taking on a serial appearance, producing from already known patterns or molds places almost identical in ambience from city to city: New York's South Street Seaport, Boston's Quincy Market, Baltimore's Harbor Place, Savannah's Riverfront. San Antonio's Riverwalk, The Pueblo of Los Angeles, San Francisco's Fishermen's Wharf, Seattle's Pioneer Square, and so forth. [...] The question to address in the beginning is why the return of the aesthetic? Simplistically answered, we will find it to be what Theodor Adorno referred to as the long march of the commodity through culture; eventually even city space and architectural forms become consumer items or packaged environments that support and promote the circulation of goods. (Boyer, 1988, 50-52)

For walkable urbanism, it could be added that the architectural forms and developments in their entirety are themselves nothing else than commodities as we are observing "the commodification of architecture" (Sklair, 2006, 38). The aestheticizing dimension accelerates

and emphasizes this trait in so far that it puts an emphasis on the image conveyed, on the consumer good for social distinction (and geographic distinction of cities competing with each other), and on the preference for access to quantity over quality already observed by de Tocqueville in his early observations of (economic) democracy in America. The continuous rise of the aesthetic up to today is simply the continuation of that long march of commodity through culture. In walkable urbanism a double commodification manifests: the commodification of architecture and the commodification of culture. Together they create reproducible and recognizable spaces. Similar to the model of food chains, the buildings' serial character makes reproduction and financing easy, and the ever same cultural goods which are sold there are equally easy to re-produce. Moreover, they are easy to desire and then to acquire as these cultural goods (from food to clothes to movies) are recognizable and accessible.

Another kind of serialization of design and creation of new markets through cultural trends is the mainstreaming and globalization of walkable urbanism's design and life-style into places where walking has always been part and parcel of the urban fabric and life. Urban planning projects and new markets are created in the example of the walkable coffee of Reykjavik, Iceland. Geographically and intellectually somewhere between American trends for walkable urbanism and Jan Gehl's Danish implementations of Italian city planning against northern modernism, the city of Reykjavik shows signs of walkable urbanism's discourse and practices. Which is strange as such, as globalized discourses and planning practices are simply implemented in what is already a pedestrian oriented fabric that is now called walkable, as if that were an issue. Together with the mainstreaming economy of tourism, shopping streets are being designed and pedestrianized and coffee shops reflect the restless walkability on the remote island of Iceland, where there is no more time to sit and sip your coffee as you could certainly visit more shops during that idle time. Indeed, the hand holding a paper cup (while the other holds colorful and branded paper shopping bags) is probably part of the physicality of the 'walkable body' discussed later.



This coffee is made for walking. Walkability is even a topic on the island of Iceland thanks to the mainstreaming or globalization of urban planning scholarship. City planning poster on the left and Coffee shop branding on the right on this little terrace of a Café adjacent to a pedestrian shopping street in Reykjavik, Iceland. Local culture seems to ignore these tendencies for another while as the terrace and the inside of the café are full of people sitting and sipping. Photograph by author, 2015.

Not only is capital returning to the city through walkable urbanism. That trend is well underway with millennials and baby boomers alike flocking back to the city. Apparently, millennials walk more than older generations and are more inclined, at least intellectually, to use mass transportation and to live in attached housing (National Association of Realtors and Portland State University 2015). Suburbia and edge cities and whatever polycentric entities that have been created are becoming the focus of walkable refitting. Indeed, not everyone can move to the city but everyone can understand that a daily commute is unpleasant. To even out those ripples of insight suburban walkable centers are built. After all, more joy can be found in the entertaining

paths of walkable sub-urbanism. There is money and control to be gained in suburbia, as well, as everyone has now also understood the capitalist dictum of enjoyment, as pointed out earlier. The political economy of capitalist urbanization includes going back to the dreary suburbs now and revitalizing them with what has been advertised for so successfully: walkability. Reading the images of suburban walkable urbanism projects, the imaginary produced around the notion of walkability evokes a leisure-time activity, entertainment as in walking through a theme park, as the image of the Avalon development below shows.



Video still from a preview for the Avalon suburban walkable development in Alpharetta, Georgia. "Experience Avalon – Coming Fall 2014 (New Preview)", "Avalon", *You Tube*, November 29, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLYyFzjmbnA>

This picture shows the example of a suburban walkable space. Is it suburban walkable urbanism or walkable suburbanism? Alpharetta, GA is a car-centered suburban landscape with sprawling malls. This is not a downtown revitalization project. It is a remodeling of a suburban landscape. This development aims at allowing people to do several tasks in a pedestrian setting (gym, dine, shop, entertainment) rather than driving from one to another, according to SPUR, a member-supported non-profit for 'a better city' who listed this development as an exemplary case of

walkable urbanism (spur.org). “Bringing a complete community to a suburban center” is the sub line for SPUR’s case study example of Avalon. But how is this community defined other than through its spectacular consumption? What civic activity could take place there? It is a private property, and a look at their rules of conduct will give more insights on this question. Clearly it fulfills walkable urbanism’s advice on designing walkable places with imageable objects and buildings one will remember, just as one might remember Hogwarts after seeing it first in the cinema and then at Universal Studios.

## Standardizing Walkable Urbanism and Walkability

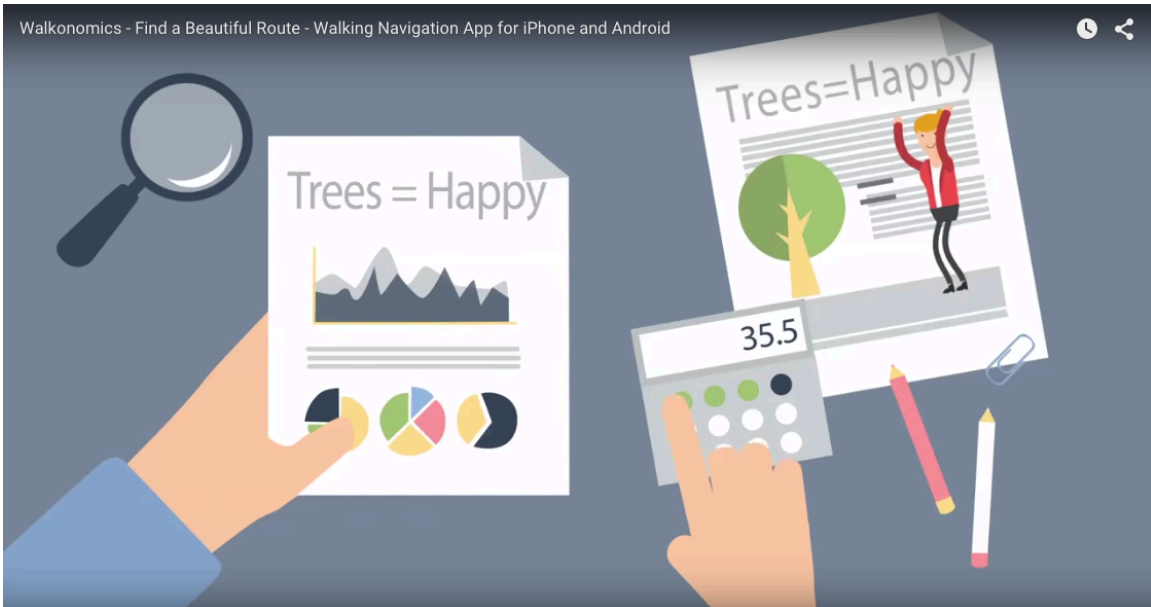
As walkable urbanism gets more and more popular, from town councils to real estate agents to day-trippers and home-buyers, walkability has become a reference in people’s vocabulary and in the set of categories by which to evaluate a place. It has also become one of the leading criteria for urban planners, practitioners and students alike, in their development or re-designing of places. So much so that it has become an abstract dimension to be added to urban design. Planners are seeking to define it by adding design standards, by trying to measure factors that influence the felt quality of walkability, by referring to entertainment and consumption elements that they associate with walkability. It is in everybody’s mouth, in every urban blog or planning journal, it is even a requirement for many urban design and planning contests, but what exactly is associated to this term? What do people want to do in walkable places, or what do they think one does there? How is that conveyed? How is this new behavior, this new mobility formed and in-formed, and what kind of bodies do we need to form for these new spaces? In the images that represent such design we see many of the same elements repeated, as urban planning literature is publishing manuals that try to standardize walkable and pedestrian-oriented design (such as Campoli, 2012; Duany & Speck, 2010; Ewing & Bartholomew, 2013; Ewing & Handy, 2009) as discussed earlier on the example of Kevin Lynch’s methodological legacy.

Apps have been published that work on the accessibility of walkability and walkable urbanism through algorithmic calculation of the walkability of a place. They try to become more and more extensive in their consideration of factors while at the same time they define walkability for us.

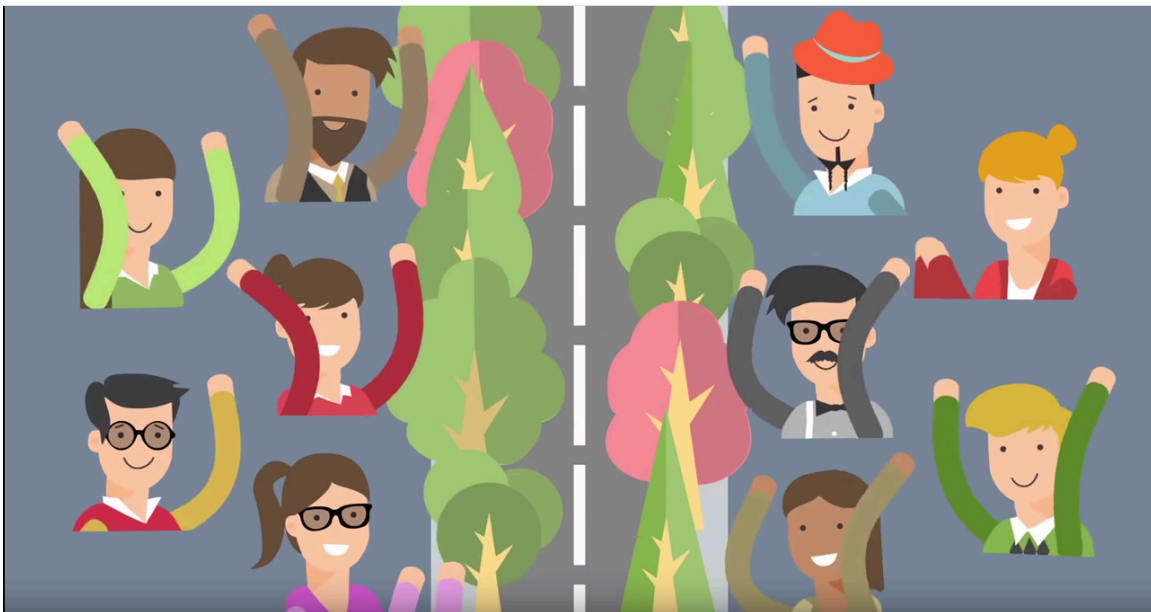


Walkonomics App gives a definition of a walkable street.  
From: walkonomics.com [Fair Use]

The people at Walkonomics want to define what a walkable street actually is. They prepared instructional slides as the one shared above. For them, trees are most important, as they follow a study that found trees make people happy. Their app serves only a handful of cities in the UK and the US yet and its goal is to “find the most beautiful walking route to anywhere in your city”.



“Studies have shown...” Animation still explaining the reasoning behind their app. From walkonomics.com [Fair Use]



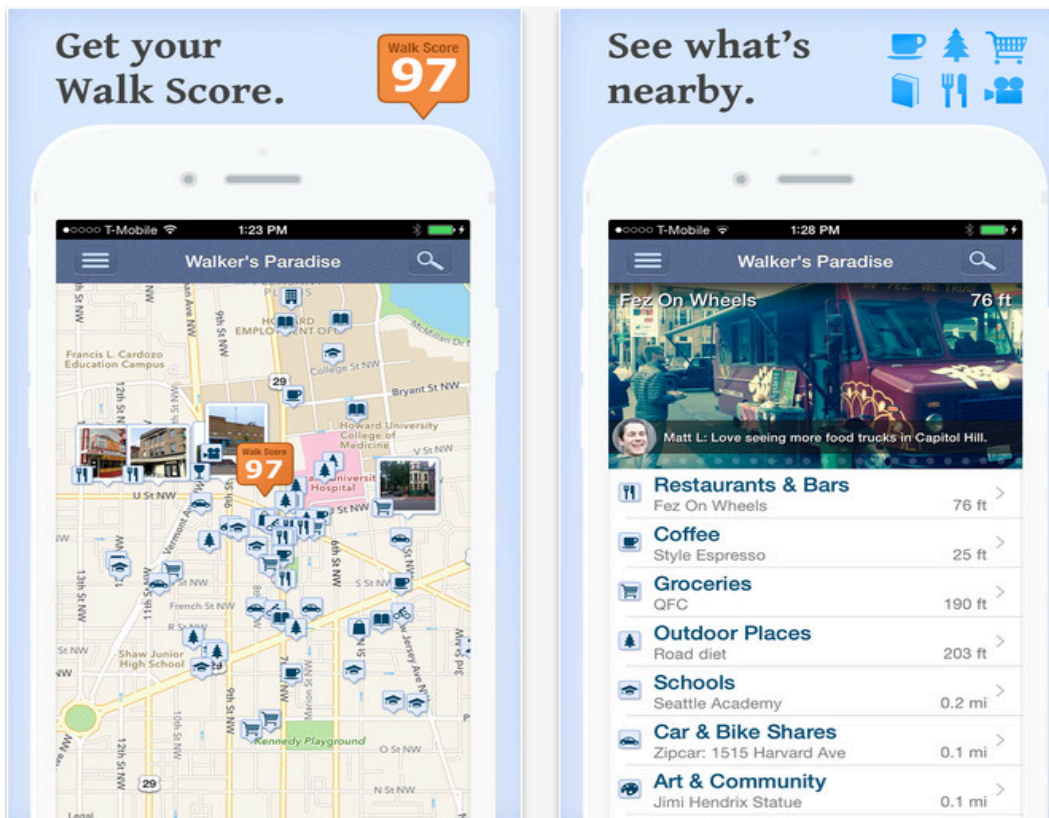
“...that trees make people happy.” Another animation still explaining the reasoning behind their app. From walkonomics.com [Fair Use]

Their happiness is about as cheerful as my description of their app. Maybe this is an example of making money with walkability apps by bringing in the psychological dimension of Kevin Lynch's behaviorist, imageable cityscape. For Walkonomics the calculation loop is easy: walking + economics = app, app + psyche = economics.

The pioneering walk score app has upgraded from the simple 'Walk Score' algorithm which included proximity to shops, restaurants, entertainment and a bank to the 'Street Smart Walk Score' algorithm which is advertised as including much more local data such as pedestrian friendliness, zoning kind, depth of choice. The old version used to offer a description of their method, the new version does not share how 'pedestrian friendliness' is defined or what exactly the 'local data' is composed of. It pops up in the app, though, simply as category to choose from. They also developed a 'choice map' feature one can subscribe to in order to find restaurants or whatever is needed at the moment. They also added a Bike Score. Most interestingly, shortly after appearing on the web, Walk Score became a real estate search engine – Leinberger's vision is apparent.

In my random test uses of Walk Score at home in Michigan and Virginia as well as on trips around the USA, it appeared to me how limited the algorithmic calculation of walkability is. The Ann Arbor, MI example: Walk Score could give me a high walkability score when I was standing on the parking lot linking Ann Arbor's Wasthenaw Whole Foods grocery store and the Barnes and Noble bookstore. In truth I was also just meters away from a four-lane route cutting me off of anything else, a huge intersection, and highly car-dependent strip malls and residential sectors. It would give me a pretty excellent Bike Score of 82 for my home address in the Old West Side and only a quasi excellent Walk Score of 76. The site explained there were excellent bike lanes, whereas, personally, I found it very stressful to ride my bike in slalom on the narrow lane between the Michigan potholes and the speeding SUVs. Clearly, such aspects are hard to factor in. The somewhat lesser walk score was due to the fact that only "most" errands could be done on foot. But I actually really appreciated that it was a 12 minutes walk on sidewalks

through a pleasant neighborhood with a handful of “scores” such as schools, cafés, and university buildings, gradually getting denser on my way downtown. Obviously, walkability (and bikeability) have a subjective dimension and the Walk Score app is only an aid to orientation. The Walk Score site shares their wish to see each real estate ad to feature the number of bedrooms, the number of bathrooms, and the score number achieved on walk score. Three numbers of social distinction. It is not about walking, it is about social distinction through being able to afford the new markets that capital is creating with walkable urbanism. I’ll close this parenthesis on the standardization of walkable urbanism through apps reading Chris Leinberger again: “Walking isn’t just good for you. It has become an indicator of your socioeconomic status” (Leinberger 2012) The taken for grantedness of technology and its prescribing force contribute to standardizing and reifying walkable urbanism in its most profitable way.



Walkscore iphone app screenshots.  
From: itunes.apple.com [Fair Use]

The desire to make American towns and cities, even suburbs, more walkable and to sell the walkability to real estate clients and tourists has led to the quest for a repeatable scenario, a recipe for mass produced walkability design which might not be in some of the pioneers' spirit of 'pedestrian pockets' which will gradually link more and more 'transit oriented development' pockets to mass transit networks or of the possible 'life between buildings' that allows civic interaction to happen (Calthorpe & Kelbaugh, 1989; Gehl, [1971] 1987).

Again, my aim in this work is not to denounce the various initiatives to further the walkability of places. I don't want to offer yet another attack on New Urbanism either. Indeed, the efforts that reflect on our transportation practices and our built environment can only be welcomed. As with any 'rebellious' or innovative initiative, there lies the danger of it being recuperated by the dominating forces in ways that we might not notice right away. Opposition can be as simplistic as people finding cyclers and pedestrians on the street dangerous, disturbing or even subversive, as humorously depicted in this graphic:



Image making fun of the imaginaries about cyclers being subversive or even revolutionary.  
From: [forum.woodenboat.com](http://forum.woodenboat.com), accessed July 1, 2013 (image not online anymore), [Fair Use]

These thoughts hark back to old imaginaries about pedestrians (and cyclers, and bus passengers, anyone who is not in an individual car) being either of a lower class, mad or ethnic, and to the prevailing American fear of communists – or is it socialists? The aimless stroller is described in Ray Bradbury's short play called 'The Pedestrian', in which the protagonist wanders off into the future on one of his evening strolls and gets stopped by police men who find it suspicious that he walks with no other purpose than walking (Bradbury 1966). But there is also a less visible opposition against walkable urbanism. It plays on the level of power relations in the socio-economic and spatial organization of our society. It refers to the dynamics of the dialectical movement of the bigger social, economic and philosophical order we are living in. Foucault has problematized various ways in which power is distributed within society and, like water, finds its ways to spread into every corner in order to maintain – even if in new forms – the dominant reign (Foucault 1980). Similarly and earlier, Adorno and Horkheimer analyzed the dialectic of enlightenment where various stages represent different forms of the logic of enlightenment and its distortion and aspects through time. Both approaches problematize the suave interrelation of economy, science, and culture which develop the logic of enlightenment and its predominant expression in capitalism. The forces of capitalism form the core of the mechanisms shaping the social power relations. In this sense, it is necessary to understand walkable urbanism in its economic and social-political context: as a spatial form of capitalism with social consequences. The fact that walkability is becoming a sale's pitch for real estate premiums, that a whole spectrum of gear, clothes and even cars (think Subaru) go with a walkable life-style, that walkable neighborhoods are becoming an exclusive place of social distinction through consumption rather than through civic activity, all point to the necessity to try and understand this phenomenon in its economic and social context in which capital has found new markets through walkable urbanism.



'Walkable Subaru' in Ann Arbor, MI, a sign of walkable life-style.  
Photograph by author, 2012

## The New Non-Places

What kind of places are these new walkable urban developments? In various writings on the postmodern urban landscape the notion of 'non-places' has been used. Let's discuss this in an attempt to encircle the object of walkable urbanism. There are at least two uses of this notion: one is Marc Augé's concept of 'non-lieux' – 'non-places' – that he developed in the context of his anthropological and geographical thoughts on 'supermodernity' and the urban landscape (Augé 1995). The other is 'non-place' which is mostly found in writings on planning, it stems from Melvin Webber's notion of a 'non-place urban realm' (Webber 1964). I chose to take a look at these notions because it might reveal some differences in point of view between a predominant American planning approach on the one hand, and social anthropology on the other

hand, in my attempt to apply social anthropology to the study of walkable urbanism in America and see beyond the common limitations of conventional approaches in the planning literature.

The biggest difference, it seems, between US planning approaches and social anthropology (and continental European social science in general) is their different emphasis on psyche and emotion in planning, and on society and culture in anthropology. While planning research falls back on the individual and his or her behavior, social science, and especially social anthropology, tries to understand the individual in his or her social context, that is, it really tries to understand the social context first and then progresses to understand the dialectical relationship between the individual and society.

The planning discourse on ‘place-making’, ‘sense of place’, ‘rootedness’, etc. is a very good example of this difference. It is based on a narrative of loss (Arefi 1999). It bemoans a loss of attachment, meaning, belonging and other such feelings. The planning practice then seeks to remedy or “heal” those injured places by suggesting engineering and design solutions that are meant to revitalize the relation between place and people. It is mostly a diffuse notion of Modernism or modern planning in the spirit of Le Corbusier or simply the abandonment of a place due to de-industrialization and similar economic shifts that is blamed for this general loss. The functionalist approach that is indirectly criticized in the use of the notion of Modernism, is again applied in urban design and planning when scholars and practitioners search for material cause for an urban effect, and for a planning solution that creates a psychological effect expressed in notions such as ‘sense of place’. ‘Sense of place’ represents a discourse that relates the built environment to notions such as ‘attitude’, ‘emotion’, ‘affect’, ‘behavior’ and ‘choice’. Such examples are most popular in the writings on transportation planning (e.g. Cervero, 2002; Forsyth, Oakes, Lee, & Schmitz, 2009; Rodriguez & Joo, 2004). While they do take into account a certain contextual dimension – the built environment as in planning controlled features like density, width of sidewalks, block size, etc. – these planning approaches are all based on a behaviorist approach in which the built environment triggers a certain

behavior in people, maybe varying a little depending on their demographic data. It is this methodological individualism – most strongly represented in the behaviorist emphasis in planning research – that limits the insights in urban design and planning issues.

Moreover, it is this same epistemological paradigm that considers architecture and urban design in terms of individual taste rather than in terms of culture and social context. The lack of integrating what Edward Soja coined the ‘socio-spatial dialectic’, the lack of consideration of the social context all together in American urban design and planning research might be responsible for the creation of a built environment and society that are far from being healed – if this is, at last, the stage we are looking for, as Nan Ellin suggests:

The notion that the talents and energies of architects and urban planners should contribute to mending seams, not tearing them asunder, to healing the world, not to salting its wounds, has grown much more widespread in acceptance. (Ellin, 1999, 5)

It is the objectivist obsession with empirical evidence that limits the scope of much of urban planning research. Pierre Bourdieu sums up the schism between subjectivists and objectivists as follows, saying that alleged objectivity through statistical evidence is not what makes social science objective:

By its very existence, sociology presupposes the overcoming of the false opposition arbitrarily erected by subjectivists and objectivists. Sociology is possible as an objective science because of the existence of external relationships which are necessary and independent of individual wills, and, perhaps, unconscious (in the sense that they are not revealed by simple reflection), and which can only be grasped by the indirect route of observation and objective experimentation; in other words, because subjects are not in possession of the meaning of the whole of their behavior as immediate conscious data, and because their actions always encompass more meanings than they know or wish, sociology cannot be a purely introspective science attaining absolute certainty simply by turning to subjective experience, and, by the same token, it can be an objective science of the objective (and the

subjective), i.e. an experimental science, experimentation being, in the words of Claude Bernar 'the only mediator between the objective and the subjective'. (Bourdieu, 1991, 129-130)

Let's turn to the non-places now. There are some critiques on the limitations of Augé's concept of 'non-places' that go into the usual canon that criticizes certain views of postmodern society as nostalgic because they do not acknowledge the heterogeneity of postmodern society (Merriman 2004). Indeed, it is important to take a close look at the contemporary places one studies, however – and this might be another difference in Continental and Anglo-Saxon research – there is also a difference to be made in research levels: theoretical ideal-types in the tradition of Max Weber allow for the thinking and interpretation of a social phenomenon, whereas the focus on empirical evidence in the tradition of Robert K. Merton never allows for a broader historic, cultural and philosophical understanding of a phenomenon and thereby fails to provide major insight into the problem that is studied (Bourdieu 1975a; T. W. Adorno 1969). Emphasizing the heterogeneity of postmodern places might simply be due to the empirical approach that is overwhelmed by all the wicked details it cannot place into a context or social order of some kind that would help to understand what is going on.

Marc Augé's concept of 'non-lieux' is simply an ideal-type, non-place and place are two poles of a problem. As he explains himself in an article going back to this concept, there is no absolute non-place, just as there is no absolute place. The concepts of 'non-lieu empirique' and 'lieu anthropologique' are two extreme poles of the problematisation of social cohesion.

Le couple lieu/non-lieu est un instrument de mesure du degré de socialité et de symbolisation d'un espace donné.<sup>20</sup> (Augé, 2010, 172)

Moreover, non-places can tell us just as much about a given society as places, non-places are part of our culture now, we have created them. By ignoring them or by trying to get rid of them

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<sup>20</sup> Translation: The couple place/non-place is an instrument to measure the degree of cohesion and symbolization of a given space.

we are only ignoring the societal issues that create them. Planners look at this problem through a lens of functions happening in a place, anthropologists, in turn, look at it from a social relations point of view. So, an empty space under a highway bridge is a non-space for a planner in Webber's tradition, but a space full of symbolic meaning that is specific to this time and space in the anthropological view. It might need fixing, but how this turns out depends on the analysis put into it in the first place.

In Melvin Webber's 'non-place urban realm' people are not spatially connected in a direct geographical way anymore. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris recognizes Webber's description in today's growing substitution of virtual space for public space through the advent of the internet (Loukaitou-Sideris 2012). Anything one needed to go out for can be bought, done, or answered online. The shift from mobility to accessibility that some authors want to see happening in planning thought has actually already happened then (Grengs et al. 2010). In this set-up, however, accessibility happens through a device in the palm of one's hand or at one's desk at home. Pushing the concept of accessibility in transportation planning leads to online accessibility.

Apart from the virtual connectedness of much of the population, planning seeks to connect people in a geographical community, sometimes involving social media, but essentially building on traditional face-to-face interaction. Indeed, the internet interactions represent a problem for real places. Connectedness is an issue. A dichotomy of place and non-place arises in planning thought, somehow the connectedness and social integration of people has to be reinstalled (Arefi 1999). As Arefi mentions, it is not only about finding material planning solutions to recreate that lost connectedness, however it is about a great deal more than studying people's emotions toward a place, as he suggests, if we want to find out how the relation between people and space works. As happens ever so often in planning literature, authors do see the unsolved problems, but they so heavily rely on behaviorist and psychological approaches that the new research that is suggested or even undertaken continues to fail in solving problems by focusing

on the individual choices rather than starting where it might be helpful: in understanding what is going on, by studying the broader context of the problem.

In the planning discourse, a non-place evokes images of dreary cement spaces under highway bridges or ill-kept grass and gravel patches at the boarder of subdivisions. A rhetoric of the dwindling usage of public spaces due to a mixture of technology keeping people inside their walls and public finance being too distressed to keep up public spaces sees those as becoming non-places, too. Main Street has become a non-place. It is a discourse of loss. And therefore something needs to be added again. This something is what urban design and planning are looking for. But what is it that is missing? Just as in religious and mythological scriptures, there is a philosophical dimension you can look for, and there is a material way that tries to substitute for that yearning without ever understanding let alone finding what is missing. Just like the attempts to re-apply or re-introduce what Walter Benjamin described as 'aura' and which went missing through not only the technological reproduction of works of art, but in photography through the very technique and process of photography (Benjamin 1972). Trying to introduce a synthetic aura to a place in an endeavor to revitalize it and to make it attractive and memorable appears to be what urban design and planning is trying to do in so many well-meant revitalizing and smart growth projects for walkable urbanism. It is, of course, an impossible task. Therefore, the hunt for aura in a context of methodological individualism relying on personal 'experience' creates spectacle. What the mainstream design and set up of walkable urbanism offers to add might actually kill the 'place' by drowning it in anonymous, automated spectacle.

And maybe non-places are actually not only the abandoned industrial waste lands, for what many have come to use the concept. Augé's concept appears to encompass more and different spaces than Webber's early descriptions that planners keep using. 'Non-lieux empiriques' stands for an important part of the landscapes of our world: airports, supermarkets, spaghetti highways, indeed places of consumption and communication, but where social interactions are mostly anonymous and automated. Some variants of walkable urbanism in their Disneyesque

implementation also create these anonymous and automated, culturally prescribed actions, such 'revitalized' walkable places are really the new non-places. They are social however, and new rules and rituals form in those places. They are as much part of our culture as the things that happen in 'lieux anthropologiques', anthropological places. These are, according to Augé, "tout espace dans lequel on peut lire des inscriptions du lien social [...] et de l'histoire collective"<sup>21</sup> (172). There are more such inscriptions of social cohesion and collective history in anthropological places than in empirical non-places, however, I would argue that in both we can read about the state of social cohesion and history, therefore both are relevant in research as in reality if we want to understand them in order to think and practice urban design.

How can the pursuit of happiness be re-enabled, revitalized in non-places? In the case of walkable urban design, the acting authority is the social institution of urban design and planning, made of government structures, real estate actors, and planning and design agents with an audience, a clientele of affect hungry people in mind who are willing to populate those places either by buying real estate or by coming to do what is offered to do in that place. It is a strange set-up of actors: a cultural demand, an economic translation into an offer, a policy or implementation strategy regulated by zoning codes, financial flows, planning ideals of social cohesion and urbanity, and the dominant aesthetics of the kind of architecture applied in this setting. The regulating and controlling factors are obvious. A cultural 'air du temps' has been slowly slowly entangled into the pillars of society, its economy, its policy and a demand that is not overtly claimed, but sensed like one senses the desire to participate in a trend, a fashion – hardly any subjective imagination involved. The new 'promesse de bonheur' is generated by people, yes, but it falls into a total system, a totalizing society of capital in which aesthetisation and creativity-focus have been devoured by the very driving forces of capital. What is left of the desire to walk and be creative in 'creative cities' or walkable urban spaces, then, is a restricted form of the anthropological invariant of the Hegelian desire to overcome alienation. It is far

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<sup>21</sup> Translation: Any space in which one can read inscriptions of social cohesion [...] and of collective history.

removed from an idea of freeing the suburban body from its dependency of the car. It is not a body walking, it is only a 'walkable body' for 'walkable' places displaying aesthetic signs of social distinction through walkable life-style. What urbanity happens with and through such bodies? It is a restricted form of what civil urban life could be. Indeed, it is far away from the civic rhythms of urban life.

Often, in a first step, communities, towns, cities in distress resort to their history. It sounds almost like a program of a self-help group that tries to build confidence by acknowledging their past achievements after a set-back. That history, from major industrial eras to workers' testimonies to minor anecdotes in the history of this country then gets fixed in a narrative trying to make the most spectacular of it. Augé relates this phenomenon to the dynamics of globalization, places wanting to be accessible for the world, wanting to get back on the map... for tourists. But as the world is more and more growing into a big 'world-city' where everything looks the same, where the same brandscapes form our landscapes, the way those local histories are portrayed are only aggravating the lack of locale. And in the context of the thesis of this dissertation, that the way revitalization is happening is linked to the aesthetisation of society after the disappointment of modernity's 'promesse de bonheur' and that it is – in most parts – equally disappointing, selling cappuccino at the information stand that is set in a 'walkable' distance from the parking lot next to an 'art gallery' only makes these initiatives more desperate. Trying to make those non-places into places has only corroborated the contemporary non-place of spectacle. The same can be said for more clean-slate developments of walkable places, entire sub-divisions (walkable, sometimes gated, communities), or mini-cities (like the new Reston, VA) or also town revitalizations on Main Street and adjacent streets that often go hand in hand with arts-led revitalization projects mentioned earlier. The methodological problems of Kevin Lynch's legacy in the context of postmodernity, as described above, shows its consequences here. Contemporary urban planning with the leitmotiv of walkable urbanism appears to be further reducing Lynch's already reduced understanding of images. To briefly recall, Lynch acknowledged the social construction of meaning of images but he decided to only

focus on the physical components of urban images for his analysis of how to shape future urban places. The handbooks on walkable urbanism continue this methodological decision and even further reduce it, backed by numerous studies on the interaction of built environment and transportation choices by scholars in transportation planning. And the design and planning practitioners clearly prefer to rely on evidence-based data. So, if Lynch said landmarks are important, there must be a landmark, like an anchor person on a TV show, like a designated sight on a tourist trip. This attitude, this approach, favors the construction of spectacle. Furthermore, through the promotional presence of towns and cities on the internet, through uncountable blogs and forums about places, people are most likely to already have seen the major landmark of a place online. And should they finally end up actually going to the place, their smartphone will guide them to it – together with “marquee signage” (Ewing & Bartholomew, 2013, 12) – and they will be able to take a picture and send it to their social media provider of choice. I’ve been there! It is not, after all, too different from sending a postcard. Except that time and space in their analogue character seem to have been overcome by technology.

While the leitmotiv of many walkable urban designs is to foster a certain urbanity, it is not clear what the image of urbanity is in American culture. The discourse and the imagery, from planning theory to urban design renderings, are composed of an amalgam of images of Manhattan’s art scene from the 1960s and 70s, of bohemian neighborhoods in Paris, of the summertime streetscapes of Italy, Danish bicycle-savvy urban population, Disneyland’s entertainment, and the order, colors, and rules of an American suburb, albeit under the new paradigm of ‘mixed use’.

[...[image](#)...]

"It's a mixed-use facility: retail space, low-rent housing, luxury apartments, and an area set aside for making steel."  
The New Yorker, December 2009, Artist: Sidney Harris

The revitalized or new real estate entities are sold or rented to businesses that are thought to further the economic uplift that comes with the creative touch and some galleries or so: restaurants, maybe a bookshop, a Starbucks, a gift shop, another gift shop, if it's a bigger place there might be an urban Whole Foods (e.g. in Washington D.C. between Dupont and Logan Circles, or now even in Detroit's Midtown), an urban REI, maybe even an urban Target (e.g. in Pittsburgh's revitalized neighborhood of East Liberty), and all the big chains of food and clothing. So, what one can do in such places is to shop, to look at craft or 'art', to drink and eat, and maybe buy a book, and to drink and eat again. Oh, and walk the half mile urban designers and planners have found to be the feasible stretch for people to walk.



Urban versions of big box shops, here for San Diego's One Paseo

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From: Walter Chambers, "What What to do with One Paseo?," Great Streets San Diego, May 24, 2013, [sdgreatstreets.org/2013/05/24/what-to-do-with-one-paseo](http://sdgreatstreets.org/2013/05/24/what-to-do-with-one-paseo)



Urban Whole Foods with planned mini plaza on extended sidewalks

© Prado Group

From: Aaron Bialick, "Planning Commission Approves Ped-Friendly Plan for Market and Dolores", *Streetsblog SF*, March 18, 2013, [sf.streetsblog.org/2013/03/18/planning-commission-approves-ped-friendly-plan-for-market-and-dolores/](http://sf.streetsblog.org/2013/03/18/planning-commission-approves-ped-friendly-plan-for-market-and-dolores/)

Is this the creativity, aesthetics and agency our society is looking for? Is this a manifestation of the endeavours to counter the lack of sensuality, play and civic agency of the modern, capitalist culture? Is this a desirable form of urbanity? Is it even urban? Or is it upscale, suburban life completed with entertainment and façade that not only fakes life yet again, but also twists the real urge and claim into a consumerist, pseudo-productive answer (because operating with fake creativity and above all with the desire for creativity which makes people buy whatever has creative appeal).

Making a place live, revitalizing it, even giving a 'sense of place' if one really wants to operate with that notion, does not happen through this kind of urban design. If it is at all the duty of urban design to answer the yearning for overcoming our time-specific alienation, for breaking some of the myth of the dialectic of enlightenment, then urban design has to be more radical – maybe in being more simple in the sense of pondering over the notion of urbanity. Urbanity

needs people who are moving around to get their tasks done. The Italian piazza couldn't have made it into the phantasmagoria of urban designers and planners if it were only for ice-cream licking tourists and fashionable, fidgety teenagers populating the squares. Urbanity lives and breathes in the rhythms of people's activities through the seasons, through the months, the weeks, days and even hours (Knox 2005b). Urbanity is not a theme of a park you can visit to experience urbanity. Urbanity is made of people living in a city, having urban lives, and above all: having and developing urban skills. Moving suburban trained people back to the city in what someone has suggested to call the new 'white infill' or 'back-to-the-city' movement (Piiparinen 2013) to continue their suburban life in higher density is constructing a new kind of urbanity: high density living with a suburban culture. The spatial form of capital of the last couple of decades has not allowed most of the American population to have an urban experience or to develop urban skills. And the set up of American cities might not even help foster them. Many civil institutions like post offices, schools, public offices are not even located downtown, there is not enough public transport to have people moving on a human scale, many neighborhoods are residential only and a long way from downtown. Urbanity is a densely woven set of skills, of pleasure and of wiggle rooms. The pleasures of having to cross a city park to get to the underground, of going for a drink after work between the office and home or the station, getting administrative errands done, discovering a new set of streets and little worlds, combining errands in one walk plus reading the cinema program for the coming week, and, while you're at it, reading the headlines of today's newspapers on the side walk<sup>22</sup>, looking for a quiet place to find your breath, knowing that street light and anticipating before the walk sign is on when exactly you can cross, knowing or learning what to dare and what not, as a woman navigating smartly through men's stares and their constant threat while establishing ownership of the city, knowing and participating in the differences between the neighborhoods, knowing when to take a car and when not to, shopping in various shops rather than in one big place, participating in

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<sup>22</sup> In their master plan for 2016 Birmingham, Michigan, written in 1996, Duany and Plater-Zyberk's evaluation of the town contains this entry: "Streetscape 8. Finding: The newspaper vending machines are an eyesore." (Andrés Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & et al., 1996, iii)

the politics of the city either officially or in grass-roots, actively making, changing, perpetuating the city and its structure, being and having something to do in that place rather than just stumbling through it like a tourist with a big purse and a list of a couple of things to check off with your purchased 'walkable body'. Since our very bodies and how we move in geographical and social space are at stake, the problematisation of power relations in the social organization of (walkable) space matters.

## 1.2. The Walkable Body

“One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs...”  
(Foucault, 1980, 58)

The sandwich-man is the last incarnation of the flâneur.  
(Benjamin, 1999, [M19,2], 451)

### The Postmodern Flâneur or the Contemporary Sandwich-Wo/Man

What are the people moving inside these walkable spaces? Walter Benjamin's thoughts on the sandwich-man capture the body-space-society relation of modernity. He found that walking billboard to be the culmination of his flâneur: “The sandwich-man is the last incarnation of the flâneur.” (Benjamin, 1999, 451, [M19,2]) Maybe he was not the last incarnation. As Susan Buck-Morss suggested, the flâneur has dissolved into many forms in capitalism:

The flâneur thus becomes extinct only by exploding into a myriad of forms, the phenomenological characteristics of which, no matter how new they may appear, continue to bear his traces, as Urform. This is the ‘truth’ of the flâneur, more visible in his afterlife than in his flourishing. (Buck-Morss, 1986, 105)

I might have found a form of the flâneur here, a sandwich-person of postmodernity, a commodified and aestheticized person becoming one with the fabric of designed buildings, images and imaginaries that surround it. That flâneur is hardly between the shifting times anymore, he is hardly a Hamlet of the Arcades anymore, the postmodern flâneur has lost the capacity of telescoping facts through the layers of history, since there is no history anymore, everything is at the same time, self-referential and complacent. That flâneur has evolved from the modern flâneur by corroborating what was already planted into him. That flâneur now can

also be a woman, thereby adding body to the mass of commodified persons stumbling through the walkable streets that were built for them, not just looking but actually buying all the goods and services that late capitalism has to offer, thereby becoming themselves a commodity of sorts. Even those postmodern flâneurs who venture into newly discovered walkable urban guerilla tactics such as flâneurs doing Parkour, flâneurs doing guerilla gardening, flâneurs attempting a dérive in the walkable streets, they are postmodern flâneurs, sandwich-wo/men, for this is the bigger strategy of power<sup>23</sup>. The flâneur has entirely become a commodity-persona carrying the labels that serve this spatial form of late capitalism: walkable urbanism. Certainly, inhabitants and visitors of walkable districts are not wearing the literal advertisement boards for products they will never buy, rather they do wear gear, fashion, accessories, phones, ice-cream cones and shopping bags that are pseudo-individualized and which serve their social distinction in life-style. In this, they become commodity as well, wearing non-choices just as the sandwich-man, as artificially embedded in the streetscape as the photoshopped people and trees in urban design and planning renderings.



Women in walkable environment carrying shopping bags.  
From: [srg.sandiegorealestatebuzz.com](http://srg.sandiegorealestatebuzz.com) [Fair Use]

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<sup>23</sup> I will explore ways out of this situation in “Walks of Art”.

What is more, in this particular example (see image above), the commodity-person is primarily a woman, a sandwich-woman, falling back to the traditional gender-role of representing the husband's and the family's status through embodying and carrying the appropriate status symbols. Maybe these women are even going a little over the top of their status by buying conspicuous consumption goods that represent a life-style bought on credit. She also represents another form of the bag lady. This is the postmodern Sandwich-(Wo-)Man, projected in walkability renderings. The goods and the life-style are carried in the bags, on the body and possibly through the manipulated body. The walkable body is not only a carrier of conspicuous goods, it is actually an embodied conspicuous good or a conspicuous good become body:

“We are no longer content with merely surrounding ourselves with ‘nice things’. Instead, we increasingly strive to become the ‘nice thing’ itself – to literally embody conspicuous consumption.” (Carolan, 2005, 84-85).

We are thus entering a different phase of Veblen's conspicuous consumption in which a relative autonomy of the body, fought for in various social struggles, is being given up for a pseudo autonomy of consumptive choice ranging from shopping to real estate to medical care. In all of these fields the postmodern body is but a commodity body.

With regard to walkable urbanism, the choice of walking comes at a price. Not only are real estate prices going up in those neighborhoods all over the country that the online walkability measurement tool [walkscore.com](http://walkscore.com) determines as highly walkable.<sup>24</sup> There is a more deeply rooted social dynamic taking place that we pay not in dollars but with the price of deception. To explain, let's briefly recapitulate the main argument. I explore walkable urbanism as a case in point for a larger social phenomenon. The lack of agency or creative autonomy that is characteristic of modernity and capitalism concentrates in the contemporary aesthetic subject. There is a yearning for a return to the human scale, at the same time an urge to and an imaginary of having technological access to everything; the aestheticization process runs

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<sup>24</sup> The latest addition to that site is the direct link to real estate offers as discussed earlier.

contradictory forces. The context of postmodernity is such that the struggle of that subject interweaves with the drive of capitalism to further commodify society. The mechanisms of capitalism have co-opted this urge and created a new market for capital to make profit through creating new urban and even suburban spaces of walkable spectacle. Walkable urbanism is the new spatial fix, the 'walkability fix'. And its human accessory is the 'walkable body'. The price paid for participating in the spectacle (in the hope of soothing one's yearning) is the commodification of the body and the giving up of large parts of our relative autonomy through buying into the pseudo-liberation and pseudo-agency of walkable urbanism.

## Aestheticized Body and Space in Late Capitalism

To explain how I arrive at this conclusion, let me make a little methodological detour. In order not to fall into the empiricist, behaviorist model I criticized earlier in regard to urban design and planning's approach to understanding people moving in the built environment, two core elements need to be problematized: body and space. A theoretical construction of these elements as concepts allows me to include the social context of contemporary walking. The goal being to depart from the models used in the disciplines which serve the design of walkable urbanism and to avoid simply treating the main elements – body and space – as reified, self-contained facts that are measured and implemented in categories of transportation modes, consumption preferences and income classes as well as in number of parking lots and trees, restaurant/office/cinema ratio and sidewalk dimensions. A constructivist approach appears helpful to consider body and space as dynamic concepts reflecting their social constructedness, and that includes and even emphasizes their potential for change. Most pressingly, the difference needs to be made between approaches in the literature and in practice who use space as a container space versus space as a social space which is both created by and co-creates society on the one hand, and on the other hand approaches who refer to the body as a

given, almost reified biological entity versus a body with a corporeality that is socially constructed and actively co-constructs society (Werlen 2005).

In urban design and planning, even for walkable urbanism, the social dimension of people moving in space is rarely fully included. The way walking is conceived in urban design and planning is a mixture of traffic engineering, planning, and empirical, behaviorist sociology. Research ponders whether the built environment matters to commuters and how (Cervero 2002; Forsyth et al. 2009; Rodriguez and Joo 2004), whether technological savviness matters (LSE and Innoz 2015), whether our senses matter (Degen and Rose 2012; Middleton 2010; Harrison 2000), and whatever other measurable factor that we can influence matters in people's transportation mode choices. Absent from the discourse on transportation mode choices and about walkable urbanism in general are reflections on the societal context and its relation to the built environment and vice versa, and to how we move with and in that environment.

How to study the body in space? David Harvey criticized the use of a natural-neutral body as 'measure of all things' (David Harvey 1999; David Harvey 2000) in postmodern research tendencies that use the body as research tool where the neutrality turns into an assumed scientific objectivity. The feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst speaks of '(Dis)embodied Geographies' to indicate how geography used to ignore the body and has found a new interest in the body both as object of study and as research method (Longhurst 1997). And since then many geographers, men and women, have taken to embodied research of various kinds. Many human and especially cultural geographers combine embodied research with aesthetic practices (Hawkins 2013b). Others rely more strongly on technology to extract bodily data, to quantify the physical and what is happening in or with the body (Shaw, DeLyser, and Crang 2015) – as far as that is measurable or even relevant in the social sciences. It is difficult for the social sciences, for geography, to take into consideration a socio-spatial dialectic, let alone to include the concept of body. Longhurst explored new possibilities of embodied knowledge, an epistemological discussion that is among other places held in postmodern theories to question

positivist science in its male, white, bourgeois, Western mind-set. One can criticize some of the feminist inspired approach, in turn, to introducing the body into research as a step back to “feminine” physicality and emotionality, to recess to the body as opposed to the intellect. The issue of feminist, and to a certain extent of postmodern approaches is precisely to overcome the dichotomous view of male/female, mental/physical, culture/nature oppositions and to find ways of doing research which sets out beyond that sticking point (Spretnak 1997). It is therefore crucial to navigate carefully through this field of embodied *and* analytic walking research and art. I’ll start out by a brief reflection on two opposite ways of conceiving of the concepts of space and body before turning to the problematisation of the ‘walkable body’ as accessory of the ‘walkability fix’, which is walkable urbanism understood as a spatial form of capitalism.

Walkable urbanism needs people walking in so called walkable streets. In my approach I favor the interrelationship between built environment and social action, in urban geography it is often referred to via Edward Soja’s term ‘socio-spatial dialectic’ (Soja 1980). Both the concept of space and the concept of body need to be studied as the argument of this chapter is that walkable urbanism creates and needs a specific body, the ‘walkable body’, in order to make this new market work. The anthropologically invariant walking body, human being’s generic and basic physical set up in terms of locomotion, has a contemporary form that takes shape in relation to the contemporary designs of walkable urbanism. The walkable body comes with a set of social dimensions that reflect the context of walkable urbanism and which I have problematized earlier as the result of an aestheticization process and a commodification process which tightly interlace in postmodernity. That postmodern aesthetic subject struggles with its counter cultural interests and its embeddedness into modern, capitalist aspects of American culture with a preference for car-reliance, progress through technology and class distinction. These aspects, in turn, are reflected in factors such as physical capacity, geographical

competence, gear and apparel, the car, purposes and spaces of walking, and other factors that clearly distinguish people's belonging to social categories like gender, ethnicity and class<sup>25</sup>.

Walking, as necessary human action related to walkable urbanism, needs to be understood as a social practice rather than a biological, physical action. What this entails is the inclusion of social dimensions in a constructivist method that helps explain the action of walking as a historically, culturally, politically, economically, religiously, geographically and thus socially influenced act. At the center of the 'social practice of walking' stands the human body as a socially dynamic entity in which physical and social aspects interact. Indeed, the urge to learn to walk might be natural, but how we walk and what this technique tells us about our social origin and our aspirations, both dimensions that we can only in part actively influence, all those details that give walking a specific form in relation to our bodies, our culture, and the bigger social picture, that is learnt rather than natural, there is an active education rather than a natural imitation only.

C'était une façon acquise, et non pas une façon naturelle de marcher. En somme, il n'existe peut-être pas de « façon naturelle » chez l'adulte.<sup>26</sup> (Mauss, 1936, 8)

As with the concept of space, the body, as well, needs to be theoretically constructed in order to prevent the trap of falling into a biological or even psychological understanding of the body. Indeed, in urban studies and planning discourses, studies abound that try to link the built environment to effects on our emotional state, which, in turn they measure with skin sensors. Often, they then extrapolate to some brain function and archaic programming as is common in the trend for neurological explanations. As favorable such studies try to be to pedestrian friendly

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<sup>25</sup> Disability is a special social category in this field, since walking obviously refers to the ability of walking. However, 'walkable' places are made accessible for certain disabled people, as long as they comply with other social norms that are required in those spaces. The access of disabled people to such pseudo-public realms goes beyond the scope of this study. But it is a problematic that needs discussion. Especially in view of the fact that I argue that walkable urbanism fosters a restricted kind of walking, thereby limiting the physical capacities of people, the theoretical dialogue with the conceptualization of disability could be very insightful.

<sup>26</sup> Translation: It was a learnt way of walking, and not a natural one. In sum, there is probably no such thing as a 'natural way' of walking in adults.

fabric, they depoliticize not only space but also the people moving in that space. Both the constructivist approach of Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the post-structuralist, discursive approaches of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler offer us instruments to understand the body as this ever changing 'body politic'. Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'practical reason' are very helpful to think the body as a socially and physically dynamic fact and allows for the crystallization of its specificities in matters of walkable urbanism in relation to class, gender and other social categories. Butler's 'performativity' offers a reading of how social – only apparently physical – identities and categories, especially gender and even the assumed biological sex, are constituted through repeated acts (Butler 1988). And Foucault's writings on discipline, control and power in which the body is his major focus offers another historical and social contextualization of the body's roles in perpetuating (or changing) the dominant power relations. So here I explore aspects of the genealogy of the contemporary Western, and specifically American 'walkable body' in order to understand its social possibility, its anthropological form and its position within the postmodern Western society.

## Container Space and Social Space

The theoretically ungrounded participation of the social sciences in what has been termed the 'spatial turn' (Jameson 1984; Soja 2011) in their studies of walking involves the use of the notions of body and space in a way that risks to ontologically stabilize biologicistic concepts of body and space (Werlen 2005). Next to the predominant methodological individualism, also more qualitative, holistic approaches share a foundation in modernist dualisms that oppose body/mind and nature/culture, a separation that requires the mediation of technology and aims at dominating nature.

As early as in 1899, Otto Schlüter, Professor in Berlin, wrote a paper called 'Bemerkungen zur Siedlungsgeographie' (*Notes on the geography of settlements*). He emphasized the importance of understanding the duty of geography as the science of the spatial order of things to be the theoretical construction of a knowledge about the physical and the social world, bringing together the more empirical knowledge that other disciplines have acquired into a meta-level of social and geographical understanding, very much what certain critical geographers are bringing back today:

“Durch Grösse und Lage ist aber das Geographische an den Siedelungen nicht erschöpft. Städte und Dörfer sind Teile der Landschaft, die gleich jedem anderen Stück der Erdoberfläche die Vereinigung einer ganzen Reihe von Eigenschaften darstellen. Genau ebenso nun wie etwa die Küsten nach ihrem gesamten Formcharakter der geographischen Forschung unterliegen, so auch das sinnlich wahrnehmbare Bild der menschlichen Ansiedelungen. Auch hier muss die ganze Fülle der kennzeichnenden Eigentümlichkeiten untersucht, und durch typische Gliederung das Ähnliche vereint, das Verschiedene getrennt werden.”<sup>27</sup> (Schlüter, 1899, 65)

The difficulty now lies in interpreting that complete image of human settlement in a way that benefits our knowledge about them (e.g. walkable urban places) and goes beyond a descriptive or a behaviorist or functionalist explication of the involved relationships:

“Wo andere Wissenschaften gerade eine möglichst scharfe gedankliche Scheidung vornehmen, setzt sich die Geographie zum Ziel, das thatsächliche Ineinandergreifen der Kräfte zu erkennen.”<sup>28</sup> (Schlüter, 1899, 66)

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<sup>27</sup> Translation: Size and location do not exhaust the geographical dimension of settlements. Cities and villages are part of the landscape. Similar to other pieces of the surface of the earth they represent an entire constellation of many different characteristics. Just as the entire formal character of coastlines, for instance, is the subject of geographical research, the entire sensorially perceptible image of human settlements should be considered. Here as well, the abundance of specific characteristics needs to be studied, and typologies need to combine the similar and separate the different.

<sup>28</sup> Translation: Where other sciences apply a clear intellectual separation, geography aims at recognizing the actual intertwining of forces.

The lack of such theoretical construction and vision might be one of the reasons why the formulaic construction of walkable places – built on an endless set of new codes on the one hand, and a spectacular conception of urban space on the other hand – leads to restrictive spaces which again disappoint the current yearning for agency and expression. Space, including designated walkable space, needs to be understood in its social (economic, cultural, ...) dimension in order to bring insights. Simply acknowledging a concept or notion of space does not bring about the spatial dimension of a phenomenon. The 'spatial turn', as Ed Soja suggested to call his observation of a growing interest in the social sciences that focused on space (Soja, 2011), is not so much a paradigm shift in the sense of Thomas Kuhn than a trend no one wants to be caught missing. The prolific use of the term space in every possible discipline, what Doering et al. also humorously call "Räumeln" (Raum meaning space, and the suffix -eln being a German way of using a verb or noun that indicates obsessive but mostly uninformed fumbling with an object of interest), has led to the general assumption that the spatial turn actually happened, as their introduction to their anthology called *Spatial Turn – Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Doering and Thielmann 2006a) remarks with a chuckle:

"Irgendwann hat die Konjunktur der wissenschaftlichen Rede vom 'Raum', über '(andere) Räume' und 'Verräumlichung' ein bestimmtes Emergenzniveau erreicht, so dass man tatsächlich davon überzeugt ist, es gäbe den spatial turn."<sup>29</sup> (Doering & Thielmann, 2006, 11)

What is most irritating about the spatial rage in the various sciences is less the fact that a multitude of disciplines are now using the term 'space' in manifold ways as a trend but the apparent amnesia towards already existing approaches that have been combining the concepts of space and society in a fruitful way for decades and most notably using space as a dynamic, dialectic order rather than a physical container space: either the holistic German geographers

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<sup>29</sup> Translation: At some point the conjuncture of scientific talk about "space", "other spaces" and "spatialisation" had reached a certain level of emergence, such that you end up being convinced that the spatial turn has actually happened.

and planning theorists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or French sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu and his conception of social space or even early anthropologists in their ethnological, architectural and geographical studies of dwellings (and there certainly are other approaches and scholars that already made those connections that are hurtlingly absent from today's analyses regarding space).

Adopting this trend too quickly or easily entails a certain amount of epistemological non-vigilance or risks, among the most consequential ones is maybe the reification of space, a problem raised by geographer Benno Werlen, among others (Werlen 2006). This approach is my hinge between geography and sociology to point out the limitations of a materialist-only focus in urban design and planning, as discussed previously with the example of Kevin Lynch's methodological choice of considering only the material features that compose an urban image and how this tradition has been kept up by contemporary urban design and planning. Werlen, in turn, suggests to problematize space as constituted by social action, rather than seeing it as a fixed topographical, cartographical or container entity in which things happen. Despite Soja's suggestions of using an approach of a social, temporal and spatial dialectic to understand human action and thoughts, the dimension of space is uncomfortably handled mostly as a fixed entity that is at its best associated with some architectural elements of style and design, but rarely as a socially constructed product, that is constantly being made, reproduced and changed: "we must not base our analysis on the spatial aspects of social conditions, but on the activities that constitute those socio-spatial relations." (Werlen, 2005, 47) A lot of studies involving either walking as method or studying walking proper mobilize geographical references simply because walking takes place in space, is place-making, can be mapped.

Is it the meta-science that brings together the various dimensions and disciplines as suggested by Otto Schlüter at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century already, or rather a science that looks at only one slice of the social cake, the one where it is written on the icing: space? Maybe various postmodern, qualitative and experimental tendencies have found a home in geography because

it has opened up to experimental research and interdisciplinarity more than other disciplines especially in the Anglo-Saxon social sciences where sociology is devoted to quantitative approaches or 'middle-term theories' at the most and where anthropology mostly focuses on the exotic or on archaeology. In order to overcome the judgments of either negating history or geography, I would like to share Foucault's understanding of geographical metaphors:

"Territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it's first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power. Field is an economic-juridical notion. Displacement: what displaces itself is an army, as squadron, a population. Domain is a juridico-political notion. Soil is a historico-geological notion. Region is a fiscal-administrative, military notion. Horizon is a pictorial but also a strategic notion." (Foucault, 1980, 68)

It is in this sense that spatial and social dimensions should be combined to fully understand their role in a given place and time. Werlen's suggestion to study the activities that constitute space goes hand in hand with Bourdieu's understanding of a social space as a net of power relations that are reproduced – and also changed! – through people's actions and thoughts. This approach, in combination with Foucault's questioning of social institutions' role in constituting the social order helps me construct the socio-spatial and historical dialectic of walking. It is in such a socio-spatial dialectic that I can attempt to understand the representations and practices of walking as social practice, as social interaction and intersubjectivity, as our everyday making of geography that is happening less within a delimited container space than with this dynamic multi-relational dimension called space.

Zygmunt Bauman's take on how the measure and value of space and time have changed in the course of modernity is very helpful for understanding the status of walking in our Western society, posting efficiency as a key driver of this era that reaches up to today (Bauman 2000). It also helps to grasp the effects on space, on landscape, and the changing relevance of human scale in this development. Walking, as human being's most basic and essential means of transportation, can be looked at as a standard for human scale, both in terms of time (speed)

and space (space covered, and space experienced). It is also quite useful in my attempt to understand walking as evolving from a necessary practice to a practice of choice (for some), while other forms of transportation become a necessity (the car), and some forms of walking could be again understood as necessity. Bauman mentions that as we still had to walk by necessity, far (distance, space) and long (time) meant more or less the same thing. With modernity and technologisation, he argues, faster transportation lead to investment in vehicles in order to conquer more territory. That territory then had to be protected from others, the stronger party made the maps. So time was the instrument to conquer valuable space, efficiency was thus very important if the goal was to conquer more space in less time, thus eliminating all idle time. In terms of car-reliance, the majority of transportation planning and indeed of the transportation imaginary in the US still abides to the doctrine of conquering space through accelerated time.

In that era which Baumann calls 'heavy modernity' size was power, that is also where that heavy, bulky architecture we see in America comes from, Bauman refers to GM's Willow Run factory as example of an enormous industrial space, running on exact time schedules, somewhat incorporating capitalism's principles. Elias analyzed the social construction of time as serving the capitalist need to control labor, among other variations of time (Elias 1988). The workers were thus bound to the time schedule of the factory. This heavy infrastructure also bound the workers (labor) to the factory (place), which, in turn, bound capital. This obviously became a problem during the crisis of Fordism and led to massive job-losses and empty spaces, the massive abandoned steel buildings also generated the term "rust belt", denominating the de-industrialized places of America. The second phase of modernity, according to Bauman, was/is light, because it is built on software. Capital has become much more fluid, production is just-in-time to prevent stocks, employees are flexible, time and space have new roles: With the internet, any space can be reached in any time and thus, Bauman argues, space becomes irrelevant through the speeding up of time – what Ben Agger calls 'instantaneity' (Agger 2004). The new rulers are the ones that achieve highest instantaneity, and

they can decide what speed they want, all the others, still heavy, are ruled over. Speed or the choice of speed becomes thus the new object of social struggle.

Now, the question of who can decide to slow down becomes relevant in the decision between walking or hopping into the car again. Referring to Manuel Castells, Bauman draws an image of the powerful who are almost floating in space, since they can easily decide over where they work and live and go on holidays and in what speed they prefer to do this, indeed, speed is the tool to be able to do all this, while, on the other side, the powerless are, and this is his reference to Castells, more bound to place, and have only their identity to hold on to. I would like to add that the powerful have to live somewhere as well, and they rather strongly contribute to shaping a landscape reflecting the described space-time relation: privatized condominiums and privatized gated communities, reflecting an architecture of fear (Ellin 1997), fear of the populace, stirred by various riots in the 1960s (Detroit) and in the 1990s (L.A.). There is also the educated middle class that takes pleasure in choosing its speed, and thereby influencing real estate values. Apparently, the measured walkability of a place rises the real estate prices, this phenomenon was called the 'walkability premium' (Pivo & Fisher, 2011). Another aspect of slowing down through walking is the imaginary of authenticity that Sharon Zukin (Zukin 2009) relates back to Jane Jacobs' influence: In the 1960s Jacobs criticized modernist planning and suggested denser, livelier urban neighborhoods in which 'eyes on the street' would guarantee the subtle social control that makes a place feel safe (Jacobs 1993). Zukin criticizes the underestimated effect or legacy of Jacobs' writings and interventions, in creating an imaginary of walkable urbanism, of diversity and creativity allowing for real estate to capitalize on these values and imaginaries through various sequences of gentrification and what she called 'loft living'. Planning also became more involved in community action and became afraid of big visions (such as Le Corbusier or Moses put forth). There has been a lively debate about whether the direction planning took since was a good thing to happen to the 'trivial profession' of planning (Campanella, 2011), or if her work and the developments since have lead to the neo-liberalization of space through that kind of community involvement and gentrification at the

same time (Michael Gunder and Hillier 2007; M. Gunder 2010). It becomes clear, that the fine mechanisms that construct and deconstruct space need to be taken into consideration when planning to create new space.

## Biological Body and Social Body

Just as we need to conceive of space in its social dimension rather than as a container space, the body needs to be conceived in its social dimension in order to understand the dialectic between space and bodies. It is not a biological, fixed entity, on the contrary, bodies and how we perceive and use them change over time and are different in different cultures. The early anthropologist Marcel Mauss, whom I have pointed out earlier in regard to his total social fact (walking) wrote *Les techniques du corps* in the 1930s. This is his first attempt at theorizing our use of the body, and it still presents the theoretical foundations of a socio-anthropological approach to understanding the uses of the body as a cultural phenomenon.

“J’ai donc eu pendant de nombreuses années cette notion de la nature sociale de l’ ‘habitus’. Je vous prie de remarquer que je dis en bon latin, compris en France, ‘habitus’. Le mot traduit, infiniment mieux qu’ ‘habitude’, l’ ‘exis’, l’ ‘acquis’ et la ‘faculté’ d’Aristote (qui était un psychologue). Il ne désigne pas ces habitudes métaphysiques, cette ‘mémoire’ mystérieuse, sujets de volumes ou de courtes et fameuses thèses. Ces ‘habitudes’ varient non pas simplement avec les individus et leurs imitations, elles varient surtout avec les sociétés, les éducations, les convenances et les modes, les prestiges. Il faut y voir des techniques et l’ouvrage de la raison pratique collective et individuelle, là où on ne voit d’ordinaire que l’âme et ses facultés de répétition.”<sup>30</sup> (Mauss, 1936, 7)

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<sup>30</sup> Translation: So, for many years I’ve had this notion of the social nature of the ‘habitus’. Please note that I am using the Latin term ‘habitus’ that is well understood in France. The term translates much better than ‘habit’ does Aristotle’s ‘hexis’, the learned and ‘faculty’ (Aristotle was a psychologist). It does not denote those metaphysical habits, that mysterious ‘memory’ that is the subject of so many volumes or short and famous dissertations. These ‘habits’ vary not only with the individuals and their imitations, they vary above all with the societies, their education, convenience and fashion, and

Imitation, for instance in learning how to walk, Mauss explains, carries a physiological and a psychological dimension. But we do not learn to walk by natural imitation alone. We gradually add a notion of prestige and other social components to our technique which carry the social dimension that surrounds us. He argues that the three dimensions or elements, physiology, psychology<sup>31</sup>, sociology, are inseparably combined:

“C'est précisément dans cette notion de prestige de la personne qui fait l'acte ordonné, autorisé, prouvé, par rapport à l'individu imitateur, que se trouve tout l'élément social. Dans l'acte imitateur qui suit se trouvent tout l'élément psychologique et l'élément biologique. Mais le tout, l'ensemble est conditionné par les trois éléments indissolublement mêlés.”<sup>32</sup> (Mauss, 1936, 8)

There is thus, according to Mauss, a grading if not a hierarchy of skill levels in regard to bodily techniques, and this is closely linked to the social dimension of these techniques, how and why we learn them, and how we practice and perfect them. Techniques are necessary for all sorts of situations and they vary from one culture to another. Let's look at how Mauss attempted to classify the techniques of the body for a first study of different forms of techniques. Mauss points out that we immediately think of tools with which to apply a technique. But our very immediate tool is our body, and in this sense we first develop techniques of the body (*les techniques du corps*), how to move it, how to hold it, how to use it, how to present it, and so forth. And these techniques, again, are constituted through a combination of physiological, psychological and social factors. He suggests two levels of classification. I am summarizing

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prestige. We need to understand them as techniques and as the work of the collective and individual practical reason where we would normally only see the soul and its capacity of repetition.

<sup>31</sup> The early sociologists and anthropologists developed their approaches in a spirit that actively distinguished itself from psychology to mark the difference between the focus on society and the focus on the individual. At the same time, however, Sigmund Freud developed a psychology which included the larger cultural and socio-economic aspects of the psyche. It is in this understanding that Mauss included psychology in this triple approach to the body and 'total man' combining physiology, psychology and sociology.

<sup>32</sup> Translation: It is in the personal prestige that brings forth the orderly, authorized and proven action, in contrast to the imitating individual that lies the social element. In the imitating action lie the psychological and biological elements. But the whole, the ensemble is conditioned by the three elements which are inextricably linked to each other.

them because it appears useful to see the extent of techniques that otherwise are taken for granted rather than understood as socially constructed.

The first level of classification refers to a higher level of differentiation between cultures as it looks at big social categories:

- Different techniques for different sexes (or genders)
- Variations through time, what we think is hereditary has a strong social component
- Efficiency in getting the desired outcome
- Passing on of the forms of techniques, details of physical education and its social origins

The second level of classification refers to a chronological study in terms of biography (from baby to adult) and in terms of a daily schedule:

- Birthing techniques (positions, helpers)
- Nursing and educational techniques (e.g. starting to **walk**, posture)
- Techniques of adolescence (e.g. initiations)
- Techniques of the adult age
  - Sleep techniques (e.g. with or without some sort of furniture, lying down or standing up or even while riding a horse)
  - Wake techniques of recreation: passive and active techniques (e.g. dance as active, aestheticized recreation)
  - Techniques of activity and movement (e.g. **walking**, running, jumping, climbing, swimming, forceful movements)
  - Physical hygiene techniques (e.g. washing)
  - Techniques of eating and drinking (e.g. use of hands or cutlery, manners)
  - Reproductive techniques (e.g. sexual positions, in close relation to morals)

In the case of walking, a mixture of efficiency, ability, and social norms forms people's gate. In order to theoretically construct the concept of body and forms of walking, I suggest to take on from Mauss the insight that together with physiological and psychological factors, our ways of using the body are socially influenced. The way people learn, control and guide their body's movements is closely related to the culture and society they live in, it is in direct connection to social cohesion and tradition that we educate our children to use their bodies in a certain way, that we more or less consciously do things in a certain way: "C'est grâce à la société qu'il y a une intervention de la conscience. Ce n'est pas grâce à l'inconscience qu'il y a une intervention

de la société.<sup>33</sup>” (Mauss, 1936, 22) Being part of a society requires a certain amount of adaptation to its values, ways of doing things, sharing symbols. How we use our bodies is part and parcel of this participation and adaptation. Moreover, space and the particular architectural and urbanist designs of the physical and social spaces we move in, are part of society and co-shape and represent our physical presence and our movement. So it becomes all the more interesting to use this approach to understand how we move in the new spaces of walkable urbanism and to attempt to construct the concept of the ‘walkable body’ that evolves together with the spaces of walkable urbanism.

The question remains if physical, bodily autonomy of how we move and where we move is in connection with a political autonomy in our society. It is the question of the role of the body in the reproduction and adaptation of the power structure in Foucault’s terms. In combination, the anthropological approach helps us to fine tune the reflections on power and autonomy, as they are not absolute opposites. Often, freedom is misunderstood as a situation in which one can do whatever one likes to do. The problem with this understanding is that it ignores that it is a given that whatever one does is influenced by context, be it social, physical, political or other. Freedom, therefore, is always relative. Moreover, the desire to walk is not, in my focus here, a desire to walk in whatever way, in whatever place, at whatever time. It is much more about evaluating the possibility of (re-)educating the body-mind to skillfully develop the bodily techniques necessary to walk cleverly and to interact with others in the built environment, ultimately to co-create civic life through physical presence. Walking is a reflection of a culture’s relation to skill and craft. Mauss gives a first thought at this conscious craft:

“Je crois que toute cette notion de l’éducation des races qui se sélectionnent en vue d’un rendement déterminé est un des moments fondamentaux de l’histoire elle-même: éducation de la vue, éducation de la marche - monter, descendre, courir. - C’est en particulier dans l’éducation du sang-froid qu’elle consiste. Et

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: It is due to society that consciousness intervenes (in our acts). It is not due to unconsciousness that there is an intervention by society.

celui-ci est avant tout un mécanisme de retardement, d'inhibition de mouvements désordonnés; ce retardement permet une réponse ensuite coordonnée de mouvements coordonnés partant alors dans la direction du but alors choisi. Cette résistance à l'émoi envahissant est quelque chose de fondamental dans la vie sociale et mentale. Elle sépare entre elles, elle classe même les sociétés dites primitives: suivant que les réactions y sont plus ou moins brutales, irréfléchies, inconscientes, ou au contraire isolées, précises, commandées par une conscience claire.<sup>34</sup> (Mauss, 1936, 22)

In regard of the techniques of walking it therefore becomes interesting to look at the more developed skills, the smart and clever ways of moving through space that involve not only bodily skills but also spatial skills that vary according to the environment and the ecology: urban skills, mountain skills, situational skills, and so forth. The desire to walk and to have walkable places needs to be understood not only in terms of wanting to overcome the restrictions of a car-based landscape, there is a general push that I've contextualized earlier toward the aesthetisation of society and the desire for creativity and self-expression. Based on this context, contemporary walking in the USA needs to be assessed in terms of this culture's impartation of skills to its members. In part, the yearning of the aesthetic subject is also a nostalgic yearning of skills lost to technology.

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<sup>34</sup> Translation: I think that the whole notion of the education of the races which self select themselves in regard to a certain outcome and efficiency is one of the fundamental moments in history itself: the education of vision, of walking – climbing, descending, running. It happens particularly in the training of keeping calm and focused which is above all a mechanism of slowing down, an inhibition of uncoordinated movements; this delayed action allows for a more coordinated response with coordinated movements towards the chosen outcome. This resistance to letting turmoil take over is something fundamental to social and mental life. It separates and classifies even so called primitive societies on a spectrum that ranges from more or less brutal, ill-considered, unconscious reactions to isolated, precise reactions that are guided by a clear mind.

## Socio-Spatial Skills for a Socio-Spatial Order

For our time, the process of civilization that Norbert Elias described offers great insight since civilization happens not primarily through the mind but through the body (Elias 1978). In his extended study he analyses how Western societies changed their practices of and thoughts about instincts, affect, and emotions between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century towards a more and more controlled and decent behavior. That process went through all the social strata and classes, making them more equal but also elaborating finer differences between them. Elias by no means describes a planned or conspiratorial strategy, rather he points out how historical events and demographic facts worked together to bring forth this civilizing process in which the body is the center point of attention and change. Moreover, this process is not described as linear, rather various stages and characteristics need to be understood as products of their place and time that might even develop in a contrary way and are still evolving today as the control of human agency and action is at the center of social and spatial order.

The new focus on the human in the Renaissance helped foster a greater care for oneself and a general attention to the individual – this was also the time when the first etiquette books appeared. From the courts and the aristocracy, the fashion for manners trickled down to the lower classes. Elias points out that part of the willingness to comply with the new rules and morals has to do with the increasing interdependency between people. The division of labor makes us dependent upon one another and we'd better behave in a manner that supports our chances to be included in the exchange of labor and goods and services – this constant necessity of controlling one's desires and instincts, however, might lead to a growing dissatisfaction. At the same time, the on-going control leads to a psychological and physical self-constraint of one's thoughts and practices, very much in the sense of Foucault's auto-censure that happens in the context of continuous surveillance in the panopticon. Today, in public spaces, this control is represented through surveillance cameras or the photo-function of each and everyone's smartphone, and the possibility of being immediately featured online in some

social medium (Foucault 1975; Koskela 2000; Gilchrist 2012). And with Bourdieu, this constant performance mode can be understood as the perfect environment to practice social distinction, showing off or simply reflecting unconsciously one's social status through taste in clothes and appearance, but also through more incorporated social values and indicators that show in posture and gait, but also, finally, through the very choice or options in which spaces to appear. From the view point of critical theory, especially Marcuse, this is yet another form of domination through Gleichschaltung of the larger population through alleged individual choices, and of ontologically stabilizing the social and spatial order. Again, Leinberger's New York Time statement is exemplary, also in order to understand the walkable body's symbolic force: "Walking isn't just good for you. It has become an indicator of your socioeconomic status" (Leinberger 2012)

The civilizing process that Elias described is not a linear process. In the context of America certain specificities need to be taken into account. The young nation had (and still has) a huge class gap – despite the predominant middle class imaginary, economically and culturally the larger population much rather corresponds to the lower classes, as the preferences in types of sports, in food, in life style, etc. show. Elias points out how the lower classes respect a strong body as it incorporates working class values of hard work and masculine strength that has to prove itself in direct physical contact. The rather unrefined tastes in food show a more complex relation between the strong believes in science, technology, and efficiency that are associated with progress, a value system that is coupled with a certain medical and general hygiene-related illiteracy of the larger population.

While for some walking in certain spaces to commute or for a stroll is a sign of their higher social status, for others walking is not an option, not only because they might live in an unwalkable place, but more importantly because it is a sign of poverty (or madness!). The same can be said for bicycling which, according to anecdotal information I received from social science researchers, racializes transportation planning in so far that such class differences in the

imaginaries of walking and biking often correspond with ethnic differences. Why go back and walk or bike when finally there is a car in the household? Even if that car has been there for a while now, the social distinction matters and is a priority for many.

In the context of American culture the believe in progress is closely related to the civilizing process, both with and without the association with upward social mobility through adopting these morals and standards of behaviors. And the notion of safety plays an important role in this problem. Elias points out how not only the proliferation of moral norms made society safer, but also how the concentration of physical power at the level of the state in the form of police and military and correctional institutions minimized the violence of robbery, assault and arbitrary law. The difference to Europe though is that in the young nation of America, such open violence still took place in far more recent times, and certain city neighborhoods today show very high crime rates. This might account for a heightened sense for safety in American culture. But also the ideology of fear which is perpetuated daily through the media and which is an arm of domination. The car, especially the big car, offers a certain amount of safety through enclosure, force and speed. And it also offers a capsule to get away from the daily drag of commuting by marveling in speed or on off-road adventures in a motorized interpretation of freedom (Lewis and Goldstein 1980). The body is not directly exposed to others as in the open space of a street. If one choses to walk on the street, then an amusement park like setting such as in walkable urbanism seems the safest.

Insofar the car is part and parcel of an architecture of fear, which also contributes to shielding people from the streets. Architecture reflects several eras of fear, nourished by different societal contexts in different times and places. The postmodern fears are set in a tension between globalization and technologisation on the one hand, and a retreat from the public realm into private, possibly gated communities and the secured home on the other hand (Ellin 1997). The two poles probably enhancing each other, since, the more we retreat from the public realm, the less we invest in protecting and using public space, the more fearful we become of them. Public

space needs people, but the trend certainly goes toward building pseudo-public spaces, developed Italian piazzas with boards displaying codes and rules of conduct and with limited access in terms of social categories and time.



New York City, High Line park rules. They are similar to rules of conduct in a museum, or in gated communities. Education of urban skills and civic rules of cohabitation seem to start at point zero. Compared to certain private developments they are still minimal. Photo by author, 2012

There is an abundant literature and discourse on the reign of fear in the USA, the media being one of the main propagators of information telling people what to dread at the moment. The culture of fear mostly effects women, building on the imaginary of the 'weaker sex', and can be understood as an instrument of oppression and control. Especially in regard to walking, women are constantly reminded that it is unsafe to walk – if not unsuited, after all, the notion of a 'street-walking' woman refers to the lowest class of sex workers – unless women are walking in designated places to shop and show off the social status of their husbands. To be accepted,

women need to be walking in designated places with a designated purpose. These purposes, it appears, can be largely reduced to shopping, meeting girl friends, or working out. All activities need specific outfits so that the purpose is recognizable.

While walking appears to be disturbing, it is a different story when it comes to jogging or walking as a workout. From the angle of the process of civilization, walking has not only been overcome in a general cultural and economic shift towards a broad American middle class, where driving is a sign of having made it. Walking was also overcome in the development of the predominant values of technology and progress which favor the car over the slow and simple human locomotion. Extrapolating from the process of civilization and the establishment of new morals and rules in Europe as described by Norbert Elias, I speculate that similar manners and new feelings of shame and embarrassment for physical functions of the body were further developed in a specific way in the American context. Driving a car, then, seems far more sophisticated than walking or biking. The air conditioned car that needs no physical effort to be moved and leaves the driver in perfect cleanliness (another specifically American feature of civilization) conveys a superiority to the driver compared to the walker who is exposed to the weather and whose physical effort brings forth physical signs of this effort, such as sweat, redness, smell, breathlessness. Physical effort is associated with low class, just as heavy physical work is associated with low-skilled workers. The American middle class can afford not to use physical effort. It has arrived at a stage of progress, economic ease and civilization that allows the middle class to merit convenience rather than effort. Making it in America is associated with the affordability of convenience – to the detriment of physical competence and health. Physical effort means labor for the lower classes, as physical capital is the only thing they have to offer on the labor market. The only physical effort that is recognized, and in some strata of the middle class even required, is a good workout. And for many the preferred workout is jogging, or its softer version, sporty ‘walking’. What about walking in the spaces of walkable urbanism then? As the commute to the city center hardly happens on foot, and as few people actually live downtown (although this is changing) the outfit and the purpose of walking in the revitalized

walkable center will likely be as compartmentalized as walking or jogging for fitness is. There is no flow between physical presence in the public space because activities are separated through imaginaries of spatial order which translate in zoning laws and in people's imagination of what is possible where and when.



Jogger line in Central Park, New York City.  
Photo by author, 2012

The jogger or the walker needs to be clearly marked as athlete through his or her gear and apparel. Walking or running the streets is no issue when working out, since the person can be clearly recognized as a health seeking individual that probably strives to have a certain accepted body. All is well, then. As Carol Becker noted on the 1980's hype for aerobics classes and dance movies, women's new image of a toned and strong body is a double-edged sword: "Although this new image of woman is undoubtedly progressive, it has created a new set of burdens" (Becker, 1987, 66). On the one side, it is a progressive move towards physical strength and movement, emancipating the weaker sex toward action. On the other side there is a new dictum

of a toned body one has to achieve in order to please men, in order to be a beautiful woman according to the current fashion. That piece of emancipation has turned itself against women.

But the sporting goods industry thrives on women's interest in sports. As walking is not only a focus of urban designers and planners but also of health practitioners, walking to fight obesity, to improve heart health, and so on, is also promoted. Often discourses of health, environmental friendliness and real estate go hand in hand, together symbolizing the state of the art of civilization of the educated individual with a certain budget. Indeed, walking has become so mainstream that recently this advertisement popped up while I was checking the weather forecast on weather.com. Under the image of a perfectly shaped woman in training gear stretching against a rusty metal door of a probably abandoned but revitalized industrial building stood this text:

“Walking is simply putting one foot in front of the other, so why don't we do more of it? You need the essentials for a walking workout that will get you off that couch. Throw on a pair of bamboo socks, lace-up some super-supportive walking shoes and stay hydrated with your be-green Nalgene. With this walking gear guide, you're on your way to losing weight and having a happy, healthy heart.”



Advertisement on weather.com [Fair Use]

The uncategorized woman walking on the street, capable of using her body to walk, choosing to walk, represents a threat to the established culture of complacent car-drivers who subordinate their physical capacities to the disempowering practice of driving, as much as it differs from the athletic walker or runner in high-tech sports gear featuring customized colors. Therefore, the woman needs to adopt a style, a life style, which is recognizable as compliant. It feels like an individual choice but it really is what is possible at the moment. So, the woman needs to become the contemporary flâneur, the sandwich-woman carrying branded gear and bags to mark her status, her supposedly political engagement (sustainably harvested bamboo for socks and a water bottle) and ultimately her active subordination to the spatial and social order of postmodernity.

In the car, people reconfirm the predominant modern bodily form: the technologically assisted body. They thereby reinforce auto-censure to stabilize this form of domination and control through the body. The current Western body is a technologically assisted body. The car, the medical system, and many devices assist this body in its everyday tasks in an imaginary of well-merited convenience and science-proven safety.<sup>35</sup> The rebellious body who is fed up with commuting through desolate landscapes and who is interested in walking now comes into the game. But it is a co-opted body. It is preconditioned through the modern heritage of technology and the middle class ideology of social distinction through convenience. Therefore it is all the more prone to being co-opted by the dominant interests of power. Power has found a way of shifting the control of the body into the new realm of walkable urbanism which combines discourses on health, environment and even community. The Surgeon General has published a Call for Action to further Americans' health through walking in September 2015. In other words, capitalism has found a way of marketing the body of the postmodern aesthetic subject, of

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<sup>35</sup> To a certain extent, mobile technology continues this technological assistance even for the walking body. But there might also be more cunning uses of technology, after all, human beings have always, since the use of sticks and stones to make fire, used technology to advance.

having it co-create new markets in the new spaces of walkable urbanism. Capitalism has found a new market, and this time the body is part and parcel of it.

## The Walkable Spectacle Needs Walkable Bodies

The interesting development now is the occurrence of walkable urbanism as this new category of designed urban space, sometimes not even urban, but simply a feature of a development out on some field, like the famous New Urbanist development in Michigan called the Cherry Hill Village which is neither a village nor a hill, nor is it properly urban. This is not a revitalization of an abandoned suburban strip mall or an endeavor to introduce communal centers into the suburban landscape. Starting in 2000, Cherry Hill Village was built from scratch, around a few singular historic buildings that formed a crossroads hamlet in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: an inn, a church, a little school, two houses and a farm.



Sketch for "historic" Cherry Hill Village in Canton, MI, a new urbanist development  
From: [cherryhillvillage.org/downtown/](http://cherryhillvillage.org/downtown/) [Fair Use]



Cherry Hill Leasing Office.  
Photograph by author, 2013



Empty theatre district.  
Photograph by author, 2013



The village center is for lease.  
Photograph by author, 2013

Cherry Hill is an example of walkable urbanism gone wrong. Or maybe it reveals its very essence: the fake character of its ‘walkability’ and the commercialization of a yearning that is again disappointed. The inhabitants have a suburban culture and continue to live it, there is no alternative since they need their car even to drive to the elementary school or the medical facility down the big country road. They have suburban bodies with suburban techniques, a suburban habitus which, in this spatial context, has no need to adapt to different challenges as they can simply continue their suburban life. The storefronts made for the walkable theatre district are unoccupied and no one walks there in the first place. The village center piece, a pseudo-historic building referring back to a general store and hosting (at least a sign indicating) a “Village Doctor” and a Café is already up for lease again and empty.



In the single family home sector of Cherry Hill streets and yards are empty. It is a sunny and warm day in May.  
Photographs by author, 2013

Just as Cherry Hill Village reveals the fake character of many designs for walkable urbanism, there are also developments or revitalization projects that thrive on the same characteristics that brought Cherry Hill to fall. In there, people display their new walkable bodies, complete with their social status and preferences in fashion, food, and entertainment.

A good example of a development of walkable urbanism that reflects the consumerist aspect and the tourist experience mentioned in the previous chapter is the Virginia Reston Town Center. This is not R. E. Simon Jr.'s Reston of the 1960s, it is a recent, more urban, development. Its homepage states (italization by me):

“Reston Town Center combines elements of the ideal downtown: the vitality of an Italian piazza and the diversity of a French boulevard. Easy-to-access stores make shopping a year-round pleasure. You’ll discover famous names and specialty shops lining the brick streets. This acclaimed *outdoor venue* offers more than 50 retail shops, 30 restaurants, a multi-screen cinema, and the Hyatt Regency Reston Hotel. And at the Center’s hub, the Pavilion hosts special events, concerts, festivals throughout the year and ice skating in winter, making this the focal point of the community and Northern Virginia’s ‘downtown’.”  
(<http://www.restontowncenter.com>)

I’ve been there once. We had to stay a night in Washington D.C. and I could not help thinking of Asterix and the ‘Mansions of the Gods’ (Gosciny and Uderzo 1971). We arrived in the afternoon and stayed until mid morning of the next day. Robert E. Simon Jr. and the Mobil Land Corporation founded Reston Town Center, earlier they had founded the famous Reston planned community close by in 1964, the plaza of which was supposed to be inspired by Portofino in Italy.

What a strange place, Reston Town Center, in its attempt to “combine elements of the ideal downtown” it is truly an “outdoor venue” boasting the slogan “where you can live, work and play”. My impression was to have entered an entertainment park which had its specific rhythms of customers coming and going at particular times; coffee drinkers and occasional joggers or gym goers in the morning, shoppers and hotel guests in the afternoon, and winers and diners or clients of entertainment gastronomy in the evening. Most people, it seemed, drove in and parked in one of the immense parking buildings holding 7000 parking spots that was closest to the restaurant they wanted to go. Women in light dresses, barefoot in their high heels, without coats slipped down from the SUVs and hopped into the restaurant, just as they would in any suburban place. In the evening, it appeared, Reston Town Center was not used for a particular walkable urbanism. Maybe people are still scared to walk the streets, maybe the shoes are too uncomfortable, or the sudden sensation of an unfamiliar dimension like weather keeps them from using a town in a more lively way than driving in, consuming, showing off, and leaving.



Bird's View of Reston Town Center.  
Google; Google Maps, accessed on August 22, 2013 [Fair Use]

Unlike rhythms of 'real' cities or town centers, the rhythms of people coming and going in Reston Town Center are exclusively structured by the consumption that can take place at given times and probably also by the imaginaries that are still connected to walking. The space and the imaginaries interact in this setting – closed shops don't attract any people, window shopping doesn't seem to be practiced in the USA, grouping of specific functions like retail, café or restaurant doesn't invite to go for a stroll anyways, since either everything is closed or open in one section, making it rather dead when shops are closed. Moreover, there are no civic tasks one could perform in this town center, there is not even a grocery shop for basic household errands that would also fill the place with specific rhythms and actions. Whoever works there probably leaves in the evening. Whoever lives there... lives in an entertainment park. Whoever plays there drives in and out again. So it really is a place where one cannot do much else than consume. With this comes the right gear or wardrobe that changes with the time of the day and the category of entertainment and which is only suitable for a certain activity, whence the need to drive out again and change.

The suburban body is in transition towards the walkable body. First there are just the functional walks to the car. In a place like Reston Town Center it might already feel like a little hike to get from a parking lot to a restaurant, so that's a change from the suburban style parking right in front of the venue. Then there are the tourist-like strolls that copy the tourist imaginary that is promoted by the public relations office of the development. In Reston it is the image of "the vitality of an Italian piazza and the diversity of a French boulevard" that people try hard to evoke. But they do it as consumers which has a certain passivity about it. Therefore, the town's management organizes regular festivals and happenings outdoors, so people feel that something is actually happening. It just might not be the normal movements and actions that happen on an average Italian piazza. So the walkable body is a passive one, one that diligently comes to consume in a state of deception that disappoints its yearning for creativity. It can only watch others being somewhat creative in the shows that are organized on the plaza. The walkable body is also passive in the sense that it remains technologically assisted. Most people

have become closely interlaced with their smartphones. Experiencing a walkable place in this passive tourist mode that is automatically generated through the design of the space and through the social components in it (consumption) calls for the generic taking of pictures and videos in order to post them to social media to show that one actually has a life. The phones' GPS functions also keeps people from developing any spatial skills that are part and parcel of 'traditional' walking urban skills. The walkable body appears to be a heavily dependent body. It is dependent on the guidance of the rules of the space, of the theme of the space, and the accessibility of the space in terms of class and imagined safety, and it is also dependent on the guidance of the functions of smart phones. In such walkable developments as Reston Town Center, the walkable body is being perfected into a docile body, following Foucault's theory of how power adapts and finds ways to tame and control the human body again and again. In the case of walkable urbanism, this happens less through outright repression than through stimulation of a performative body that fits into these new spaces of designated walkability and consumption. The 'walkable body' walks, but it walks the way it is supposed to in these new spaces of spectacle, these new places of aestheticized consumption and commodified aesthetics; it is not walking but walkable.

In anthropological terms and following Mauss' study of the techniques of the body the question comes up how these new skills of the walkable body are developed, passed on, and perfected. It is still a new phenomenon. The walkable body is becoming. In anthropological terms, the education of the walkable body occurs through 'imitation' only rather than through imitation and perfection and 'prestige'. Mauss' prestige is not to be confused with Bourdieu's social distinction that is linked to symbols of prestige. Mauss' prestige represents the desire to perfect the technique and thereby raise the quality and efficiency of the technique. At a very basic level, social distinction happens through imitation, the imitation of style, of posture, of gait, of choices and preferences. It is the being aware of the social dimension in these preferences that allows for some autonomy and creation. In a crude summary, we can say, the walkable body is a dependent, docile, imitating body that seeks perfection maybe only in the imitation. And this

might be the problem of the (illusionary) imaginary of a huge middle class. Linking back to the discussion of image and imaginary, the body is an important bridge between the medium of the social image (the architecture, the urban design, the walkable place) and the social image or imaginary itself that people carry about the place and the social activity that is supposed to take place in there. The alert person or the anthropologist is aware of the difference between the medium and the social image and thereby can attempt to read the medium and analyze the image as social constructions. "The distinction between image and medium also explains our deliberate, intentional shifts of focus from the one to the other." It is in this exercise that a culture can be revealed. The body, including the mind, plays an important part in this "as a living medium by processing, receiving, and transmitting images." (Belting 2011)

But there is a gap. Walkable urban design conveys an image of an idea of a European city; with this a set of activities that supposedly happen in such places. The image is fuller than the medium. The medium often evokes a feeling of fakeness as the image is so overladen with representations of what the medium should be (e.g. an Italian piazza, a busy Danish downtown). The body now needs to make up for this lack, bridge the gap between the medium and the image, if it wants to buy into the image that is associated with the medium. This is also why the walkable body is still in the making, still in transition. This is why the walkable body appears to be so dependent and directed. It is the social image that directs the walkable body to make up for the missing links of the walkable design. Not giving in to this direction would mean to abandon the idea of a walkable place. But there is a glimmer of revolt in the suburban body that won't give in. By holding on to this urge, the body adapts to bridge the gap between medium and image. Or, maybe, there simply is too much seduction through consumption and entertainment for the body/mind to be able to separate medium from image, to look between the cracks and see its construction. In any case, the body is the entity where all of this happens. The body adapts to the social necessities and the power relations in place and it carries the signs of it in its habitus.

## The 'Walkable Body': Incorporating the 'Walkability Fix'

A loss of autonomy over our bodies has led to the reign of convenience, in which technologically and medically assisted bodies are predominant in Western society. That same loss is also at the source of the longing to find back to a physical autonomy, as political agency could be linked to a physical autonomy of movement in space, a physical capacity and a spatial possibility that makes one own his/her body and participate in public space. The loss of women's physical autonomy has a long history and has seen various forms under various regimes and kinds of domination. The control and disempowerment the church and later mainstream medicine has had over women's bodies (Ehrenreich and English 2010) is exemplary for the shift of control over women and men before and after Enlightenment. This needs to be combined with the understanding of a capillary form of power as problematized by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1980), and with the incorporated and reproduced disempowerment as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu in 'habitus' and 'hexis' (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu 1990b) and with high modern and late capitalism's domination through affluence, consumption, convenience and entitlement as theorized by critical theorists (Bauman 1983; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Marcuse 1991). While we still suffer the effects of the religious and medical control, we have made it an integral part of our contemporary progressive technological society and are mostly unaware or unable/unwilling to change it – for the sake of convenience and the depth of the capillaries of our social order. These are capillaries that are nimble enough to grow anew and into different parts of our society and our bodies, should change occur, but they are connected to big and strong veins that run deep. This is not to paint a gloomy picture but rather to try and fathom the depth of what lies under a concept as benevolent as walkability. Indeed, using the theoretical construction that the above authors offer, I conclude that walkable urbanism's walkability creates a 'walkable body' that is all but autonomous, thereby disappointing the longing for creativity and authenticity once again. The walkable body is a commercialized entity, a fetish object and a body for social distinction. In this it reduces its emancipatory potential and restricts

the physical and cultural margin of freedom that was initially sought for. Power has recuperated the yearning for walking, the yearning for physical creativity, in order to keep control over its subjects. Moreover, capital has thereby found a new market for urban design, for real estate, for retail and gastronomy as well as for apparel and gear. The 'walkable body', then, is the accessory or even a necessity of capital's latest spatial fix (David Harvey 2001). In this light, I understand walkable urbanism as a socially constructed phenomenon deeply connected to the culture and mechanisms of late capitalism. Walkable urbanism is a current form of the spatial fix, the 'walkability fix'. The walkability fix is tied into the needs of capital on the levels of real estate, of economic activity in distressed towns and cities, and of consumption and recreation. It also feeds on current concerns about the environment, generally summarized with the vague notions of sustainability and resilience. What is my answer to Foucault's question one needs to ask about the kind of body a society needs? In a society in which capital is in constant quest of profit, one needs to look out for the shifting spaces in which profit is made. In a society in which the yearning for creativity has found, among others, one outlet in the demand for walkable space, one needs to observe if and how that yearning is pursued and what new social dynamics are set off by this impulse. In the case of walking, power has recuperated the "upheaval" and created a new body ideal that limits one's autonomy and links it to conspicuous consumption and mannerism, thereby creating a new market for walkable urbanism, including not only real estate, but also everyday consumption as well as fashion and life style principles. The aesthetic subject of postmodernity here is intricately linked with capitalism and its commodifying process. Walkable urbanism is an ongoing commodification of living space (Lebensraum) in that it is one of capitalism's contemporary spatial forms needing people to keep it alive, needing commodity bodies, walkable bodies. As such it is becoming a global phenomenon. Let me share this last quote from Marcel Mauss for an anthropological view on how the form of walking and everything it embodies can be very desirable and actively copied:

Une sorte de révélation me vint à l'hôpital. J'étais malade à New York. Je me demandais où j'avais déjà vu des demoiselles marchant comme mes infirmières.

J'avais le temps d'y réfléchir. Je trouvai enfin que c'était au cinéma. Revenu en France, je remarquai, surtout à Paris, la fréquence de cette démarche; les jeunes filles étaient Françaises et elles marchaient aussi de cette façon. En fait, les modes de marche américaine, grâce au cinéma, commençaient à arriver chez nous. C'était une idée que je pouvais généraliser. La position des bras, celle des mains pendant qu'on marche forment une idiosyncrasie sociale, et non simplement un produit de je ne sais quels agencements et mécanismes purement individuels, presque entièrement psychiques.<sup>36</sup> (Mauss, 1936, 7)

So-called walkable designs pop up in places that have never been car-dependent in the first place. But walkable urbanism with its spectacle together with the walkable body have reached a state beyond urban design only, it is a life-style with global aspirations. What will the next step in the evolvement of the restless urban landscape be and how will the aesthetic subject find a new rebellion to try and wriggle itself out? Can the body emancipate from its commodification?

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<sup>36</sup> Translation: I had a kind of revelation at the hospital. I was ill in New York. I asked myself where I had seen young women walking like my nurses did. I had plenty of time to think about it. Finally I found that I had seen it at the cinema. Back in France, I noticed the frequency of this kind of gait, especially in Paris; these girls were French but they also walked in that way. In fact, the American fashions of walking, thanks to cinema, started to arrive in France. This was an idea that I could generalize. The position of the arms, the position of the hands while walking together form a social idiosyncrasy, they are not simply a product of some kind of purely individual, almost psychological configuration or mechanism.

## PART 2

### Walks of Art

[T]o roam freely in imagination. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100)

It seems to me that the question one can actually pose today is that of an experiment: What will become of human beings and their aesthetic apperception if they are exposed to the conditions of monopoly capitalism? (Adorno & Benjamin, 2003, 206)

Following the anthropological study of ‘walkable urbanism’ and ‘walkable walking’ in the first part, this part looks at the contemporary form of walking as art through the lenses of critical theory as well as theatre and performance studies. After exploring the contemporary Western “walkable” form of walking, my reflections on art walking as another form or variant of human walking sets out to further contribute to the understanding of walking and agency in the Western world today. The (moving) body and mind in social and geographical space has been matter of contestation, control and liberation in many theories, struggles and everyday situations, as the previous part pointed out. The moving body and mind of both the artist and the spectator/co-walker in an aesthetic form of walking art enhances the body-mind’s fruitful ambiguity of control and liberation.

Here I explore to what extent walking as art – and in particular soundwalks or audio-walks – constitute a new ‘aesthetic form’ of performing art. I further explore to what extent soundwalks are capable of ‘aesthetic sublimation’ and of having an immanent relation to the tensions of society<sup>37</sup>, whilst succumbing as little as possible to the forces of the culture industry, and in turn offer space for interpretation and imagination.

With Adorno, I consider art as inherently social and therefore propose to analyze walking art in its social context. That context is best summarized through the notion of postmodernity as described earlier in this dissertation in part I (Jameson 2015). It is here that walking art has started to develop as a new genre or category of art. It is the context of the long-running ever developing dialectic of Enlightenment and of Pre-Modernity–Modernity–Postmodernity that brought forth walking art as we see it today and more importantly as we conceive of it today. Obviously, human beings had walked before the French Revolution already, and many ancient peripatetic traditions heavily influence walking art and other walking practices today from pilgrimage to antique walking scholars to political or philanthropical marches. In this study, I problematize walking art today in its current context of which the major elements are globalized capitalism as organizing economic system on the one hand, and postmodernity as influential intellectual and artistic trend (be it deliberately or unconsciously practiced or even just copied) on the other hand.

In numerous writings in critical theory by Marcuse, Adorno, and Benjamin, covering the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the late 1970s, there are explorations and critiques to be found of the beginnings of what we now call postmodernity, postmodernism or postmodern tendencies in art. And much

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<sup>37</sup> For the social scientist, everything is in immanent relation to society. Here I am alluding to Adorno’s differentiation made in his Aesthetic Theory between the tensions of society crystallized within a work of art and working themselves out through their passage through aesthetic form, compared to art which uses the confrontation with reality to point out certain facts rather than their social construction, their dramatic tension and the possibility of change (Adorno, 1970, 3741). Today, Adorno’s differentiation can be read as an early critique of postmodern tendencies toward performance and its de-aestheticizing use of reality and the movement away from dramatic structure. Dramatic structure, however, offers space for confrontation and options. Therefore it is important to analyze works (e.g. audio-walks) that do use reality but embed it in a strong aesthetic program (think of Brecht, think of documentary theatre today) for the strength of their aesthetic form and their capacity to ‘transcend’ the dominant social relations (Marcuse, 1977 after Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory).

of the theoretic framework elaborated by the scholars associated to the Frankfurt School continue to be valid today – even more so as the social facts and relations they pointed out are accelerating – and can be continued through contemporary observations and the attempt to expand the theoretical framework to speculate about current aesthetic forms. From critical theory to theatre studies, the discourse oscillates between the lamentation about the end of art, its fatal self-subversion through the mirroring of society’s fragmentation and its structures of domination on the one side, and, on the other side, a discourse in search of the specific potential of art in the postmodern context. In this sense, I pursue a double goal in this part of the dissertation by describing the challenges and traps that art faces today while at the same time looking out for a possible new aesthetic form – the audio-walk – as a promising new contemporary aesthetic form. This aesthetic form uses its postmodern context well by calling on traditional aesthetic capacities of the artist (dramaturgy) and the audience (aesthetic interpretation), as well as on contemporary uses of collage combining fiction and documentary, and the audience’s challenge for co-creation and participation. I study walking art, and specifically audio-walks, to speculate about their ‘fitness’ to constitute a proper, finite aesthetic form with all the aesthetic ‘magic’ and intellectual challenge it can mobilize in a disenchanted world. It is in the spirit of an aesthetic theory as practiced by Theodor Adorno that I explore walking art and audio-walks. Audio-walks are a composition of environmental and composed sounds, voices from interviewees, a narrator and any other sound element that helps build a documentary or fiction story. In comparison to soundwalks, another notion often encountered in art walking, audio-walks are more strongly guided and rooted in dramatic or documentary practice, while, strictly speaking, soundwalks are compositions of environmental soundscapes. Aesthetics stands for artistic experience or perception. Aesthetic theory, in turn, stands for Adorno’s approach to understand this, “since without a stringent reflection aesthetic experience turns into ‘empathetic appreciation’” (Lehmann, 1984, 392).

I complement critical theory’s framework of an aesthetic theory with contemporary theatre studies’ analyses of postmodern theatre and performing arts since, in this study, I consider

walking art, and specifically audio- and soundwalking, as a performing art, or, at least to come out of that development. Theater studies, then, offer an analysis of contemporary performing arts which includes theatre, dance, performance, film and the many sub- or co-versions of these art forms such as documentary arts, video, installation, site-specific performance, ... and audio-walks. The boundaries towards the visual arts are sometimes blurred, and visual art as well has experienced a lot of shifts and changes of a similar kind as the performing arts, with performance and the theorization of the performative as a moving factor and parallel development in linguistics, philosophy and the social sciences since the 1950s already. Adorno's aesthetic theory, complemented with Marcuse and Benjamin build a bridge between the social science and theatre studies here as aesthetic theory contains both. Contemporary theatre studies help me grasp audio-walks as a postmodern development in a specific social and artistic context in which new courants of art develop. 'Postdramatic theatre' is a notion describing developments within theatre, dance and performance away from the classical aesthetic form of the drama because it considers its closed logos of values and meanings guiding the dramaturgy and the emotional process of the audience as corroborating the dominant hierarchies – but we will see to what extent it falls prey to the forces of power and ends up corroborating the status quo even more by postdramatic theatre's lack of building an alternative aesthetic form that has aesthetic (and thereby political) force. Lehmann offers a useful description of what constitutes postdramatic theatre from theatrical means to technology to social context. It is very useful here to understand the pitfalls of art in postmodernity as well as for establishing the potential of making art, such as audio-walks, in today's context.

Moreover, further combining critical theory and theatre studies in an overall aesthetic theory, audio-walks also offer an example of aesthetic education as the very practice of making them can be of pedagogical value for a generation that loses touch of the analogue world and which equals art with decoration and entertainment rather than with an active working with society. Much of current arts initiatives and arts-led research programs at universities worldwide are sadly developed in that very spirit which benignly "considers art as a friendly and sensory

complementation of the scientific notion” (Lehmann, 1984, 391), underestimating the fatal effects on the social sciences these developments are having by bypassing content and analysis of content in a technique-oriented combination of natural science and the arts.

Combining critical theory with theatre and performance studies, I study audio-walks for their critical potential in the context of postmodernity, in order to overcome the dead end of self-reference, of the irruption of the real and of fragmentation which are challenging art in postmodernity. Walking art needs to find an aesthetic form that is capable of aesthetic sublimation and which allows the audience to engage physically and mentally in the process of art reception through oscillating between aesthetic form and reality, similarly to the process engaged watching a dramatized play but adapted to contemporary aesthetic means and societal tendencies, without losing the force of art to allow for comparison, interpretation and imagination.

What do I mean by critical potential? It is the dimension in art that has disruptive, subversive qualities. It is the combination of characteristics that together offer space for interpretation and imagination; or in Adorno’s words, it allows the audience “to roam freely in imagination” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100) rather than being led through a set of emotions to reconfirm the dominant values. With Marcuse, it is art’s capacity of ‘aesthetic sublimation’, a form of sublimation allowing us to deal with struggles and desires, with personal, social and political issues by creating a space for aesthetic expression of what cannot be expressed in society, a space in which issues can be solved or made worse, in any case, a space in which pressing and not-so-pressing problems can be dealt with the aid of art, contemplation and debate (Marcuse 1978). Of course, that sublimation can only depend so much on some sort of universal human understanding of art. Aesthetic and liberal arts education conveys the ‘toolkit’ (an expression of today’s restricted mind of cause, effect, and fix), or rather the perceptive and mental capacities to practice and confront the aesthetic sublimation of the societal tensions which are negotiated in a given work of art. In his Aesthetic Theory, Adorno describes society as immanent in the

work of art, such that it is not the use of 'real' moments in a piece that brings art in relation to society, but rather the crystallization of society's tensions within the work of art. Through their aesthetisation they emancipate from the factual and confront the real through their transcending force.

Die ungelösten Antagonismen der Realität kehren wieder in den Kunstwerken als die immanenten Probleme ihrer Form. Das, nicht der Einschluß gegenständlicher Momente, definiert das Verhältnis der Kunst zur Gesellschaft. Die Spannungsverhältnisse in den Kunstwerken kristallisieren sich rein in diesen und treffen durch ihre Emanzipation von der faktischen Fassade des Auswendigen das reale Wesen.<sup>38</sup> (Adorno, 1970, 3741)

Only through this emancipation and the passage through the aesthetic form, they develop their transcending form that allows for imagination and interpretation to happen. Tendencies today are to work directly with the real in art. A certain thirst for the real is spoken of by various authors and this trend finds its channels in reality shows in extremis, but also in the use of the real and factual in theatre and performance, for example through working with non-professional actors who come and present their real-life persona or their profession, through bringing animals on stage, through working with documentary elements such as documentary film, sound recordings, news-bites etc. And also through emphasizing the performative, the situation-building, the constitutive act of performing identity, social situation, social institution through speech and action. Such performative acts are often enhanced, in the performing arts, through exposing the very making of them: the actors are not those neutral embodiment beings anymore with perfect voices and movements, rather they show the sweat and the labor it takes to perform, their voices break, they scream, they lose diction in a stage situation in which situations are performed but at the same time signifier and signified are disconnected, mirroring

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<sup>38</sup> Translation: The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in the works of art as the immanent problems of their form. This, and not the irruption of real moments, defines the relation between art and society. The tensions within the works of art crystallize only in these and through their emancipation from the factual facade of the well known they meet the real being, the essence (das reale Wesen).

postmodern deconstruction as well as a globalized world in which everything (apparently) goes and everything loses its meaning. Art equally loses its strength and its potential in this setting. And all too often, not least due to the audience of blockbusters and musical's habit of being manipulated into feelings and conclusions, and the postmodern performance's audience's habit of being served a confirmation of an opaque and confusing world and worldview where the search for meaning is obsolete, even ridiculous if not bourgeois, the invocation of the real is (alas) used to press the button of emotions, empathy, fear, and similar reactions. Reintroducing the mature audience is a timely issue but a difficult one, as well:

Wer sich aber nur für die Kritik der Politik und der Ideologie zuständig fühlt, wie unsereins, gerät oft in eine distanzierte Welt der reinen Abstraktion von einem solchen politisch verursachten Leid. Hier könnte Theater ganz traditionell helfen, das Mitleid freizusetzen oder zu mobilisieren, das jeder Politisierung vorangehen müsste – und das ist heutzutage, will ein solcher Versuch nicht kitschig oder banal ausfallen, natürlich selbst ein ziemlich vertrackter Job auf einem unklaren Weg, der an Zynismus, Resignation, Wahnsinn und Hybris, ja auch der Gefahr einer Depolitisierung ins Auge sehend, entlang- und vorbeigeführt werden muss.<sup>39</sup> (Focke, 2011, quoting Diedrich Diederichsen: „Das Gespenst der Freiheit“. In: Matthias Lilienthal/Claus Philipp (Hg.): Schlingensiefs Ausländer raus. Bitte liebt Österreich. Frankfurt/M. 2000, 185)

But it is in this social and artistic context that I search to define an aesthetic form – the audio-walk – that takes up current tendencies while continuing a tradition and a belief in the disruptive force of art. Disruptive stands for that transcending force of art which allows us to reflect issues from an aesthetic distance and on an anthropological level. This is all the more difficult as current tendencies to reintroduce art into research practices and university curricula in many cases build on a functionalist, pragmatic and behaviorist understanding of art. Art is used for certain benefits, for its apparent capability or function to stimulate creativity, beautify science,

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<sup>39</sup> Translation: If one feels responsible to produce a critique of politics and ideology, like myself, one easily slips into a distant world of pure abstraction of such politically caused suffering. Here, theatre could help, in a traditional way, to release or mobilize the empathy which needs to precede politicization – today, should this exercise not end up being banal or producing kitsch, it is obviously quite a difficult job on an obscure path that needs to be led along and passed cynicism, resignation, madness and hubris, it even needs to face the danger of depolitization.

and mainly to deliver certain techniques associated with art (by non-artists) ranging from 'design thinking' to 'sandboxing' to voice training for successfully presenting the research findings to the public. Against these tendencies to instrumentalize art, against the tendencies of a public losing the capacity to perceive art and to fully seize the aesthetic moment, against or out of current tendencies of art becoming anti-art (see below), I suggest to build on the aesthetic form of audiowalks to work towards a contemporary aesthetic form that overcomes the risk of dead-ending art in postmodernity.

First, I will present the context and source of contemporary art walking and give some examples of walking art works and how they relate to their postmodern context, thereby looking at the challenges this postmodern context poses to the artistic and critical potential of walking art. Second, I will explore audio-walks from the point of view of theatre studies. I thereby suggest audio-walks as a new aesthetic form capable of both working with postmodern theatrical means and of overcoming their challenges, thereby offering a contemporary aesthetic experience that combines critique (critical theory: negativity) and a glimpse of hopeful reconciliation.

## 2.1. Art in Context

Continuing Adorno's critical theory about the culture industry offers insights on art and its context today, the relationship between art and postmodernity, since "[i]f the surface logic of the culture industry is significantly different from the time of Adorno's writing, its effects are uncannily the same." (Bernstein, 1991, 26) In this light, postmodernity is inherently bound to only make things worse despite the desire of postmodern trends to claim or achieve the contrary. The critical theorist J.M. Bernstein in the editor's introduction to the 1999 edition of Adorno's "The Culture Industry" describes the complex entanglement of postmodern art within the net of the culture industry's logic as follows:

Without the constraint of form, which dictated the path of sublimation, desublimated desires find themselves set against the same illusory comforts and real obstacles to happiness as precipitated the need for desublimation in the first instance. The culture industry's response is the production of works, typified in the new architecture, that, through a mimesis of aestheticization, indict the spectator for failing to find gratification where there is none. The release from the rigors of form into the apparent utopian play of differences should have produced a sublime release from the repressions of everyday life under capital and the only illusory dynamic of high culture. Instead, the postmodern sublime (the sublime defeat of the a priori of closed forms), through its aggressive insistence on overcoming the divide between high and low, and integrating art and empirical life, perpetuates the sublime's violent repression of desire without the concomitant moment of release. By this route postmodernism's presumptive affirmation, by offering what is repression as satisfaction, makes the moment of self-negation permanent and thus an unintended celebration of death. Because postmodernist practice alters the empirical worlds without transforming it, its abstract affirmations belie the despair that sustains it. That despair manifests itself in aggression and violence, a violence now represented, exploited and celebrated in the media. The violence

perpetuated by instrumental reason on sensuous particularity, what Adorno terms the 'non-identical', is answered only with violence. (Bernstein, 1991, 25)

I will gradually interpret this dense analysis of postmodern art and the current stage of the culture industry. Especially in the second section of this part, I will return to this summary when discussing postmodern and postdramatic theatre arts and the risks and potential of trying to make performing art in postmodernity. We will see how aesthetic form (play, drama, audio-walk) is in direct relation to the social context in which it is produced.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin points out the importance of the historical context of distinct aesthetic forms. The German Trauerspiel broke with the Greek tragedy not simply because modern drama is too weak compared to the power of the Greek tragedies as Nietzsche wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Rather, it is the historical context with all its dimensions that Benjamin analyzes in order to understand if it is the modern context which cannot stand up to the tragic form. Or, as his deliberations on allegory in the second part of the book show, the historical context drenches the dramatic material such that the audience merely watches a confirmation of the status quo (Benjamin 2009). The point I would like to make here, is that, similarly, postmodern (often postdramatic) theatre and performance experience this same phenomenon. To a large extent, postmodern productions are affirmative pieces that only confirm the fragmentation, the logic of late capitalism and the disorientation of intellect, without offering other suggestions or a space to wander in speculation. With Benjamin, then, we need to study the historical context of postdramatic performance just as much as we need to study the aesthetic form itself. And, in the same way, we need to consider the historical – including the spatial – context of walking art as well as the new aesthetic forms it generates or the forms it builds upon. While that study would exceed the limits of this chapter, it very much informs the argument made here, that contemporary walking art comes out of a distinct postmodern context and that it has to wrestle with the inherent non-art or anti-art tendencies of that context which

oppose the use of aesthetic form in order to become a new aesthetic form with artistic and critical force.

“While the abandonment of the aesthetic form may well provide the most immediate, most direct mirror of a society in which subjects and objects are shattered, atomized, robbed of their words and images, the rejection of the aesthetic sublimation turns such works into bits and pieces of the very society whose ‘anti-art’ they want to be. Anti-art is self-defeating from the outset.”  
(Marcuse, 1978, 49)

Walking has been taken up by artists for the many (postmodern) reasons as I will show below. As a performing art it carries many features of the postmodern performing arts. A strong trend for fragmentation and other features among those arts has been brought together in the notion of postdramatic theater by theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann. His seminal book has become a textbook for theatre studies with many translations, almost celebrating a postdramatic turn. While some of his critics (e.g. theatre scholar Bernd Stegemann) hold him responsible for reifying postdramatic theatre or even defending it, Lehmann’s work can also be read as a survey of the developments in theatre arts in the last 30-40 years, offering useful typologies and this major concept of postdramatic theatre. While Lehmann’s attempt to problematize and categorize theatre’s developments in a postmodern context, he is willing to see some socio-political potential in postdramatic theatre and performance.

Following Benjamin’s approach of taking into account the historical context of art, the analysis of walking art today appears fruitful in a combination of theatre and performing arts studies’ theoretical instruments, with critical theory’s instruments and an understanding of the functions of art in the Western world.

## Walking Art and Postmodernity

Some early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists used urban walking as a form of artistic expression. The spatial form that modernity took in cities called for new forms of art. While 19<sup>th</sup> century painters such as Manet and his followers were still just affirmatively painting what they observed (Clark 1984), they were succeeded by an avant-garde which started not only new kinds of painting but also different art forms, and walking was one of them.

Art critics argue that by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art became so institutionalized that even the avant-garde were eager to see their work in galleries and museums. As an outdoor art, walking as art was therefore marginalized and it was only in the 1960s or even 1970s when the first experimental artists rediscovered walking as art (Evans 2012) in a general move towards performance breaking up traditional aesthetic forms and their references (Lehmann 2005; Fischer-Lichte 2004). The appearance of performance art and of site-specific art is a nourishing ground for walking art to develop as it combines both the geographical aspect of site-specific art and the socio-cultural and aesthetic aspect of performance.

Today, there is a growing number of walking artists and various sub-genres of walking art can be distinguished. The sub-categories of interest in this chapter are autotopographical walking art (Deirdre Heddon), dance (Trisha Brown) sculpture walks (Richard Long, Hamish Fulton), performance walks (Francis Alÿs), and audio-walks (Janet Cardiff). Inspirations and origins of walking art are numerous, from the antique peripatetic Greek school promoting walking and thinking and talking, to English Romantics walking in designed gardens, to a modern English stroll in the countryside – which was more than an escape from the industrial city's fumes (Edensor 2000), to known philosopher-poet-walkers such as Wordsworth, Goethe, Rousseau, to early modern city walkers and postmodern performance artists, all the way to pilgrims, political marchers and adventurers (for histories of walking see for instance Amato, 2004; Nicholson,

2008; Rendell, 2002; Solnit, 2000). Building on this rich heritage of peripatetic practice, today's walking artists continue the traditions and invent new forms and purposes of walking. To understand why walking as an art form has (re-)immersed since the 1960s a look at certain aspects of postmodernism is useful. To see what artistic and socio-political potential walking art brings along, a look at postmodernism's traps and potential is necessary. I will do so through the lenses of critical theory and performance studies.

To understand why something as trivial as walking has emerged as a form of art over the last couple of decades, we need to analyze the context in which this is happening. Walking as a form of art emerges today from a specific context. The most important elements of that context are (the scientific and artistic) trends associated with postmodernism: a focus on everyday practices, a focus on autobiography, a focus on space (spatial turn), a postmodern yearning, and the aesthetisation of society. In that very context, performance art is born. Performance art is art that takes place on stage but also in galleries or outside of the usual places of art; art that breaks with the traditions of drama and form; art that leaves much of the storytelling or making sense to the audience. In the second section of this part I will develop this further. Here, I will briefly describe how they affect walking art. It is telling that the grandmother of performance art, as she calls herself, Marina Abramovic, performed a walking art piece in the 1980s, together with Ulay, called *The Great Wall Walk*, in which she started on the south end of the Great Chinese Wall, and he on the north side in the Gobi desert, and they would meet somewhere in the middle.

Now let's have a look at those relevant elements of postmodernism and how they relate to walking art. Understood as a postmodern form or art and of walking, those elements contribute to engender and shape walking art. As an important dimension of walking art's context, they co-create its form, its topics and its reception.

## Spatial Turn

The declaration of the spatial turn has given even more legitimation to the resurgence of the manifold scientific and artistic claims for geographic practice and knowledge involving space (Soja 2011). Indeed, any activity that has in the slightest to do with space has received this new 'tab', allowing for a wave of academic production in the way other such buzz words have created scientific and artistic trends. Walking, quite obviously, takes place in space. Too often though, this space is understood as a 'container space' that loosely relates to the discipline of geography. In order to understand the form and features of and the actions in that space though it is necessary to conceive of it as a social space that is not limited to the exact container space and which allows for the problematisation of the socially co-constructed character of space (Doering and Thielmann 2006b). For walking this is key, since walking, I argue, is more than a simple physical movement. It is more than a question of numbers of people moving and of their speed, it is more than a question of physical health through activity, it is more than a question of current urban design tastes and preferences, and, finally, it is, as I am pointing out in this dissertation, more than a question of physiological or transportation or even artistic sectors. Rather, it is a social fact that needs to be understood in its anthropological wholeness, it is a social practice with variant forms through time and space, through culture. Through practicing walking it is socially constructed and reconstructed and constructed anew. The notion of practice refers to its social character, to its performative act as other theorists mentioned in this work would call it, it is establishing the habitus and the position in social space. (Boltanski 1971; Bourdieu 1994). The way we can walk, who walks, where we walk, and what happens when we walk and what for, as well as the way we think and speak about it, is all determined by social struggles, bigger ones and smaller ones and by the social construction of reality. That said, the very social character of walking and of the space we are walking in allows for changes to happen. A literal and spatial 'marge de manoeuvre' (the wiggle room) in which the walker can reflect and add dimensions, change functions and goals and capacities of his/her stride. The

physical and geographical ability to create and find one's way is key to a relative social autonomy. Much of social distinction happens through walking, the corroboration of as well as the liberation from class, gender, race and other stereotypes and forms of domination that are embodied by the walker, can, to a certain degree, happen through the body and the activity of walking. The habitus concept is helpful in making the various layers in a body and its posture verbally visible as discussed in the chapter Walkable Body.

Postmodern dance has been experimenting with the body in space in a critical way and walking art can offer similar paths with more of them taking place outside in the 'real' world. Let's take a look at dance's contribution. Most of the more experimental and postmodern dance performances that experiment with the (social and performative) body in space have taken place outside, too, as site-specific performances. Most famous and pioneering is the piece 'Man Walking Down the Side of a Building' by American dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown where the title already says it all (see image). In an interview in 2007 Trisha Brown, looking back on her work, said the following about the piece:

"Man Walking Down the Side of a Building is not just an idea to do something spectacular. It came out of a realization that modern dance has a method of choreography. You break down that boundary through a workshop with John Cage, indeterminacy, and give up total control because things become improvised or indeterminate. Then you realize how interesting it is because indeterminacy is more arcane, and turns logical organization on its head. When you look at it, it is just as beautiful as the logical version. What it is, is something new. At the time it was a new world. It was the breakthrough introducing other ways of making modern dance. "Man Walking Down the Side of a Building" was about breaking down the rules to begin something new. When you know that you have the right of creating a new way of making post-modern dance – as they call it now – then what do you do? There are too many choices, a million things. So I was asking myself: and somebody put out the thesis, that dance has a beginning, a middle and an end. I thought where do I begin? You start at the top of a building, and you tell them to walk down. Then when you are halfway

there it is the middle of the dance. And when they reach the ground, it is the end. It had a structure to it, albeit a very spectacular dance.” (Brown 2007)

Her thoughts show just how thin the line between postmodern destruction and postmodern creation is. Breaking down existing rules creates rubble. Things are going to be lost, other things, same things or new things (a quite intriguing difference) are going to be built. We will see later in the chapter to what extent the structure she speaks of – the determined beginning, middle, and end in this case – is important as the structure is the backbone of aesthetic form. The aesthetic form conveys room for interpretation which is art’s very *raison d’être*. If many people consider it beautiful, very nice, but the reason we make and consume art is not for the sake of beauty alone. Decoration and entertainment belong to the realm of craft and play. These can very well be part of art, but art’s richness is its potential to offer spaces of interpretation, inspiration, links, controversies that make us ponder and maybe further understand our human issues.



Photograph of the pioneering postmodern dance performance by Trisha Brown *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*.  
© Carol Goodden, 1970 [Fair Use]  
From: [www.trishabrowncompany.org](http://www.trishabrowncompany.org)

Brown's piece is an example of how important the audience's interpretation is in postmodern dance and performance. One could, of course, simply marvel at the circus act of walking down the side of a building. Fair enough. And quite stunning. And some postmodern pieces really stop at that point in order to draw attention to the human effort made rather than hiding it as illusionary theatre or movies would do. More can be gained from experiencing such a performance, though. And while much of postmodern art deliberately works against the forms and values of bourgeois culture that serve as reference for interpreting a piece, it leans with all

its weight on its audience's aesthetic education that enables it to actually go beyond the circus experience and interpret the cues detected that relate to the spectator's personal, social and political context. Postmodern art needs careful analysis in order not to succumb to current trends of instrumentalizing art for its technical or decorative features on the one hand, or to be blinded by attempts to 'academize'<sup>40</sup> it on the other hand through recent theories such as non-representational theory, for example (Thrift 2004). Thrift's attempt to analyze dance shows not only how non-scientific (meaning: not theoretically constructed) his non-representational theory's conception of art – and in this case dance – is, it is also an example for the challenge of interdisciplinary work in cultural geography. (Neo-) phenomenological approaches are torn toward art for its haptic nature. But the lack of theoretical construction in these approaches opens the doors to a dangerous fall back into behavioristic, biologicistic models of thinking where there is no place for sociological concepts such as gender, class, and so on: Thrift's fiery writings about how important he feels the consideration of the everyday of disadvantaged people is appears hypocritical in the light of its essential reference to biology through his battle cry against text, contemplation and the verbally intelligible. Lastly, Thrift's non-representational theory, in wanting to deal with the underlying knowledge that guides everyday people's everyday practices, is not inventing anything new as this is the very heart of sociology's work and building on many intellectuals before him, Pierre Bourdieu has formulated an extensive social-anthropological theory of habitus and practice that, in turn, theoretically constructs the body in physical and social space rather than simply describes it.

Catherine Nash has written an exquisite critique of cultural geographer Nigel Thrift's romantically patronizing dance for the sake of illustrating his theory, her main critique being his non-contextualizing of dance, his not knowing any theoretical studies of dance, and his understanding of dance as this archaic bodily practice, pure play devoid of any social relations

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<sup>40</sup> By 'academizing' I refer to recent trends in art's education and academic self-assertion vis-à-vis the hard sciences to analyze art for the sake of higher education's requirements in written production (Butt 2012) at the loss of founding notions of aesthetic theory which inherently place art in the larger context of society, culture, religion and the political.

(Nash 2000). This only confirms my critique of the way in which art is brought into the humanities and into research in general. By reducing it to some archaic and romantically beautiful thing, art is robbed of its social character and thereby of its potential for bringing on change. In a disenchanted world, trying to enchant parts of it only reinforces the general disenchantment. The dialectic of enlightenment produces new myths which distract from the actual problems.

Indeed, one postmodern way of analyzing the spatial turn in the arts is to understand Trisha Brown's opening act into the spatial turn as an exploration of a social space in which traditional parameters of orientation have become obsolete, in which the conventional spatial and social order is turned upside down (Fischer 2010, 238). The experiment with an unstable space, and especially with the vertical ground is still fascinating newer generations of dancers as for instance 'vertical dancer' Kate Lawrence, who is inspired by Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* in which embodied, lived experience is called upon to overcome dichotomous world views of body and space (Soja 1996). Changing the common ground and making it an exploration both for the artist and for the audience is the play on spatial order:

"I am concerned with studying the operation of knowledges – tacit, empirical, physiological, practical, aesthetic, spatial, psychological and theoretical – in such performances. My dancing body weaves its way through this essay, analyzing the spatial confusion and subsequent orientation of the vertical dancer. I concentrate on her position 'on the wall' and consider how this may be fertile ground for playful and subversive thought and action, particularly in relation to negotiating established binaries such as mind/body, inside/outside, high/low. Although this ground may be fertile, it is unstable." (Lawrence, 2010, 50)

The ground on which art walking is prospering is just as fertile and unstable. Just what makes walking as art fruitfully unstable? It can, of course, be such a spatial play with the dichotomous world of up/down, left/right, earth/sky, etc. Changing the container space settings might very well help see the elements of the social space when they cannot rely on the physical space anymore. As a performing art, however, walking can work on the tension between reality in the

container space and the constructed social reality in the social space full of stories, tensions, stereotypes and destinies. These facts and fictions can be worked into an aesthetic form, a dramatized piece to deal with space and what happens in this space. Walking, then, not only takes both the artist and the audience inside of the space in question, its meditative, phenomenological and genuinely slow character together with a history of peripatetic traditions that foster argument and thought offers an aesthetic and intellectual space for perception and thought to happen.

Working with dramatization and fiction, as I will discuss later on in this chapter, is a key to unfolding walking's critical potential.

## Everyday

Reclaiming the everyday out of the claws of alienation is a strong feature in postmodernism affecting science and art. Michel deCerteau's *Practice of Everyday Life* is often referenced as a 'guide' and inspiration. The social sciences with all its sub-disciplines together with feminist thought have all worked strongly in this direction. Focusing on the everyday is also a focusing onto the individual, the subjective since the deterministic 'grand narratives' have been declared dead (Fukuyama 1992). The tension between the methodological individualism and the more dialectical approaches that consider the contextual dimension and combine the subjective with the objective (see for Bourdieu, 2003 for a discussion of methods), has been there in the social sciences from the very beginnings. Walking as art, I argue, is at the very heart of this tension as it can turn into an 'explosion of narcissism' or into an aesthetic-intellectual contribution. Walking as art, as many other considerations of the body, can contribute to the struggle over power, the struggle over freedom of movement in space.

Reclaiming the everyday in postmodernism is also thought to be a way of reclaiming liberty from patriarchal, white, and capitalist determination or domination. From critical theory's point of view, what is important is to see if the subjective, the 'non-identical' is indeed gaining force or if it is a pseudo-individuality that is taking place. Walking is an everyday activity – at least, it used to be, before the car took over. But in principle it still is a basic everyday activity which gets us from A to B, even if A is simply the bed and B the bathroom. Reclaiming the physical capacity of walking and the geographical knowledge to find one's way in the landscape is a reclaiming of power within the social order of movement in space. Focusing on walking, as is pointed out at another place in this dissertation, can be understood as an attempt to regain control over body and space by the individual, against the rule of technology, the car, the streets and the policing of all these elements. Walking participates in the rules of behavior in a given space, but it tries to gain more wiggle room and maybe install new rules that enable more walking to happen.

In this social critique of walking I am interested in contrasting the subjective power regained on the one side, and the reshuffling of power (or of our Western societies' social order) in a tendency to recuperate the struggle for spatial and bodily autonomy on the other side. The body and its abilities are an indicator for the social order in place: "One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs..." (Foucault, 1980, 58) That body then finds itself in social relations that are composed of spatially and historically specific relations: In walkable urbanism it is the force of the spectacle that puts the rebellious force at danger by herding it through the spaces of architectural and entertainment spectacle into the pseudo-individual relations of the culture industry. Guy Debord notably wrote: "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images." (Debord, 2004, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraphe) Thereby, Debord makes clear his approach of society as a whole, in which individuals cannot be studied individually and outside of the relevant social relations that they co-produce and reproduce. To what extent walking as art can brave this social relation mediated by images and continue the power struggle remains to be seen. This chapter tries to reassemble the tools to further observe and analyze walking as art and its critical, liberating potential to foster aesthetic sublimation. As

the following paragraph on aestheticization shows, walking as an art form meets several challenges posed by the society of spectacle that can easily lift walking up into a decorative and adventurous practice devoid of that roomy space that enables the audience/participants as well as the artist “to roam freely in imagination” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100). Moreover, it also offers the space for contemplation.

In his works, the pioneering walking artist Richard Long emphasizes the ephemeral of human presence in the landscape. His works – and most famously his very first big work “A Line Made by Walking” from 1967 –, in their iconographic documentation, show physical human imprints, traces on the land. And soon those traces will have vanished.



The piece that pioneered walking as art in the UK: A Line Made by Walking, by Richard Long  
© Richard Long, 1967 [Fair Use]  
From: [richardlong.org/Documentations/sculp/index.html](http://richardlong.org/Documentations/sculp/index.html)

I am including this work in the section on the everyday, because Long made this line on his way to school one summer day in 1967 and he is working the material he encounters outside (grass on the ground) on his walk/commute. It shows the ephemerality of everyday action and their traces. This is also one of the pioneering works that set out to work and 'perform' outside of the traditional spaces of high art – galleries and museums –, and instead explored the everyday spaces we walk. He is considered one of the pioneering walking artists as he himself claimed: „My intention was to make a new art which was also a new way of walking: walking as art“ (quoted by Fischer, 2010, 38). Later on, Long's work went out to less traveled paths through deserts and high mountains, the actual artistic work being the walk itself, during which he leaves traces he calls 'walking sculptures'. Some of his work might belong to the realm of visual art, the documentation of which can be seen... back in galleries and museums.

Francis Alÿs is a Belgian artist who lives in Mexico City. Among other art forms he also creates walking works which he documents with video and photography. Inspired by Situationist derives, his city strolls slow down society's speed while he walks through everyday spaces. Often the choice of his path is political, his performance poetic – or the other way round. This is also the title of a performance he did in 2004: *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic*. By holding a pot with green paint dribbling out he walked the Green Line between Western and Eastern Jerusalem. In his performance he pulls the green line again – a line which, in 1948, had been pulled with a green pen on a map – thereby making the political order of that space visible (Fischer, 2010, 118). Other performances are more volatile and philosophical, like his play on Sisyphus, in which he pushes an ice block around town until it is completely melted and the last drops of it are evaporated: *Paradox of Praxis*, 1997.



Video still from *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic*

© Francis Alÿs, 2004 [Fair Use]

From: francisalys.com

## Aestheticization

A number of authors speak about the aestheticization of society in postmodernism<sup>41</sup>. Critical theory even considers it as inherently modern and part of the consequences of the unfolding of Enlightenment (T. W. Adorno 1970; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) as the Promesse de Bonheur remains unfulfilled. Turning to art in the hope of finding a transcendental experience or at least some sort of window into another possible dimension of life is an obvious step. But the power of capital or even the power of modernity's principles then finds a way of recuperating art before it can open up any window onto another possibility:

“Because of its impotence before the power of capital, and equally because its promises come increasingly to appear as an insult to those excluded from what

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<sup>41</sup> For instance, Neill Leach speaks of the Anesthetics of Architecture through the extensive use of the image and the consequent (an)aestheticization (Leach 1999), for the aestheticization of society and the trend for creativity Andreas Reckwitz introduces the creativity dispositive (Reckwitz 2012a), for a general theory of and distinctions between aestheticization processes see Wolfgang Welsch (Welsch 1996).

is held out, culture is taken over by the very powers it had criticized.” (Bernstein, 1991, 17)

The yearning for happiness together with the acceleration of the culture industry into every social field more and more blends a pale imitation of culture into the everyday. Aesthetic styles and signs of creativity gain value in social distinction and the continued quest for happiness that is now taking place on the level of life-styles.

“Life-styles, the culture industry’s recycling of style in art, represent the transformation of an aesthetic category, which once possessed a moment of negativity, into a quality of commodity consumption. The expansion of the role of competing life-styles, the permeation of these styles into the home, the pervasiveness of music, the way in which products have become a direct extension of their advertising image, all these phenomena taken a closing of the gap between the culture industry and everyday life itself, and a consequent aestheticization of social reality.” (Bernstein, 1991, 23)

Devoid of historicized understanding of those styles they become cheap copies or pastiche in a context in which Adorno’s ‘non-identical’, or the subjective is not available:

“The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche.” (Jameson 1984).

Happiness is not fulfilled, the yearning grows. We live in a world of simulation and simulacra in which everything is self-referential. And strangely enough, the self-referential, the factual without context, is silently building its own reality or justification. In a disconnected world and worldview, the singular fact is sufficient.

Die Entschälung des Gegenstandes aus seiner Hülle, die Zertrümmerung der Aura, ist die Signatur einer Wahrnehmung, deren ‘Sinn für das Gleichartige in der Welt’ so gewachsen ist, daß sie es mittels der Reproduktion auch dem Einmaligen abgewinnt. So bekundet sich im anschaulichen Bereich was sich im Bereich der Theorie als die zunehmende Bedeutung der Statistik bemerkbar macht. Die Ausrichtung der Realität auf die Massen und der Massen auf sie ist

ein Vorgang von unbegrenzter Tragweite sowohl für das Denken wie für die Anschauung.<sup>42</sup> (Benjamin 1977)

A little bit of nostalgia for clear meanings (and styles) might still stick to some unseen part of things, feeding the yearning. The quest for 'genuine style'...

... "becomes transparent in the culture industry as the aesthetic equivalent of power [...] and is a retrospective fantasy of Romanticism." But "[e]ven works which are called classical, like the music of Mozart, contain objective tendencies which resist the style they incarnate." (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 103).

The danger herein lies in the urge to make art into something predictable, something to consume for a certain outcome in a behavioristic sense. A certain art and style is sought to fulfill a certain need. For example, mothers buy Baby-Einstein (this is a brand!) Mozart compilations for their babies to listen to while they sleep to make them smarter, undergraduate education introduces generic art classes to check the creativity box on the employers' checklist, cities have arts initiatives and new cultural policies to attract the arts and artists in the hope of revitalizing the place, apps are sold for quick imitation of design styles, painting styles, photography styles etc. Creativity and art become known entities, predictable and codified tools rather than a nudge and an opening up of new questions and ideas or simply a moment of contemplation:

Was zählt ist in Dingen der Kunst stets das *Eröffnete* mehr als das Erreichte. Mit Recht pointierte Adorno, dass alle bedeutenden Kunstwerke eigentlich nur 'Anweisungen' auf gelungene Kunstwerke blieben. Grosse Theaterabende begeistern mehr als ein *Versprechen*, denn als seine Einlösung. In dem, was geschieht, registriert ästhetische Erfahrung das Aufblitzen von etwas 'anderem',

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<sup>42</sup> Translation: To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.

eine Möglichkeit, die noch aussteht, utopisch die Verfassung von etwas unbestimmt Angekündigtem behält.<sup>43</sup> (Lehmann, 1999, 32-33)

With a general aestheticization calling for stylized work, however, this allusion is not enough. In the short term of the desire for instant gratification it is not satisfying. But in the long term view of a society's members' capacity to truly create anew, this mimesis of styles, this copying of predictable kits is what is really unsatisfying in postmodernity. The promise of happiness through art and creativity remains unfulfilled.

For walking as art the aestheticization tendency carries the risk of affirmative mimesis – not the theatrical mimesis of reality, which, if dramatized offers insights and gives room for imagination, rather only the copying of 'genuine styles' of walking or even of art walking, as the genre is establishing itself as a 'classic' artistic genre. Also the copying of imaginaries of walking as described throughout this dissertation. In the various kinds of walking art these can range from the phenomenological experience walker with pragmatist roots (think of Thoreau and Emerson as inspiration), or the geographer-cartographer who combines research and walking out in wind and weather (O'Rourke 2013), the pilgrimage or diary walker who seeks spiritual insight on well-walked paths, to name but a few. Traditions but also major walking imaginaries feed those stereotypes or 'genuine styles' and vice versa. Combined with research aspirations, walking imaginaries in practice might even contain a movement away from abstract numbers, statistics and even theories to go back to more grounded research – with the danger of a trending incomplete 'neo-phenomenology', to which some walking cultural geographers ascribe, that forgets the inevitable theory and historic context, the importance of which Merleau-Ponty points out by describing how phenomenological description needs to take context into account to

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<sup>43</sup> This paragraph is not included in the English edition of the book, so here is a translation of it: What counts in matters of art is always what has been introduced or started more so than what has been achieved. Rightly so Adorno emphasized that all meaningful works of art actually remained only allusions to well-made works of art. Grand theatre evenings manage to enthuse more by expressing a promise than through its fulfillment. In what happens, aesthetic experience registers a glimpse of something 'else', a possibility that is still in the making, that holds, in utopian promise, the creation of something undefined but announced.

further position the findings and to avoid wrongly assuming their objectivity as a gut-led pragmatism does (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Merleau-Ponty 2004).

The aestheticization of art walking also happens through the need of documenting or showcasing this ephemeral art form through images and notebooks and video or sound recordings. Very often an aesthetics of the work-in-progress is called upon in which the process, the notebook, the sketched map, and the adventurous pictures of people walking in a wild landscape (be it the rural or urban wild) are featured. Indeed, how to document such a fugitive art? The need for an artist to show his/her work in that way creates the need to give it a certain picturesque character, it has to be presentable, even able to be put up in a gallery through pictures, found objects, sketches, maps. The work on that representation is heavy-handed because the entire strength of walking as art which is experienced while walking has to be stuffed into those documents. Exhibiting walking is a totally separate thing from the art walking itself. But it is co-creating the iconography and the 'styles' of art walking. Analyzing art walking's iconography would exceed the scope of this dissertation, but it is certainly an issue worth exploring more systematically in an attempt to further understand today's social relations and the images and imaginaries constitutive of them.

There is not only the documentation of walking that manifests after art walks take place. Visual art and sculptures inspired by walks or made on walks are created during or around walks. Walking, then, is an integral part of those artist's practice and approach, almost a technique, while the final product would be categorized into other forms of art. Many artists (and scientists, and others) walk as part of their daily routine along with eating, exercising or brushing their teeth. And some use it with purpose to create, as a technique, an inspiration. Others use the found material (earth, stone, leaves...) for their work, some of these artists ascribe to land art, others want to be distinguished from it. Hamish Fulton who pioneered art walking simultaneously with Richard Long in the UK most famously and repeatedly states about his work "THIS IS NOT LAND ART", and many walking artists repeat these five words after him. Walking

artists, it seems, want to be different, more critical, more experimental, more artistic than their decorative land art colleagues, most renowned of which is probably Andy Goldsworthy with his ephemeral patterns made in nature from nature. Goldsworthy needs to walk to get to his places of creation, however, he does not conceive of himself as a walking artist.

Fulton extensively uses written words in large, sans serif type to document his work. His exhibits are often composed of photographs or graphic boards and words. Almost like a tabloid magazine he needs to associate captions or titles with images to tell his story or to make sense. Thereby he shows the step of making sense or of interpreting which otherwise happens silently within the spectator's head. But where could his spectator be in the first place? Walking with him? There are several walking artists who invite people to join their art walk. Fulton adds the dimension of the image in exhibitions of his trips to convey his message.



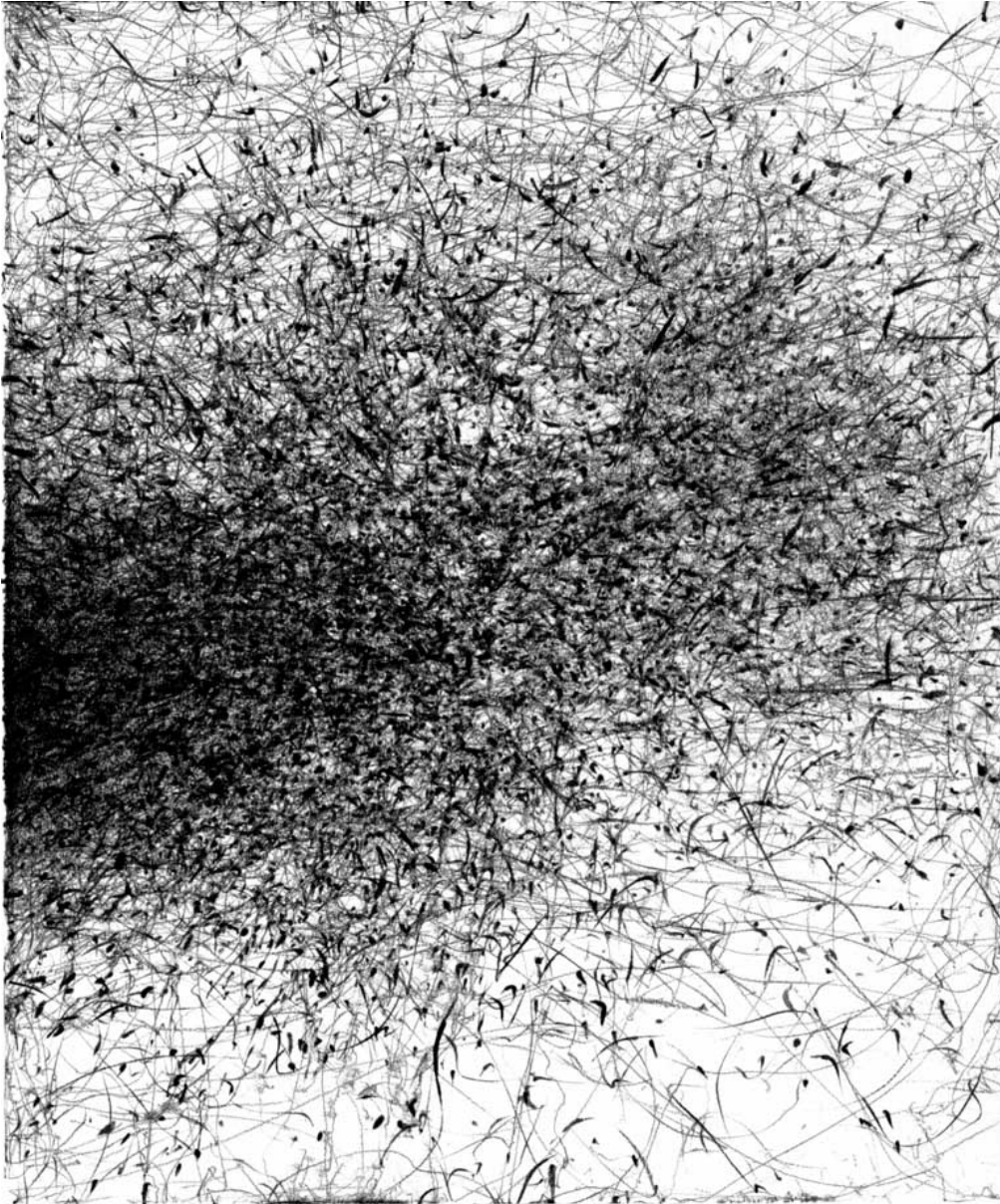
Hamish Fulton, on his Denali walk pointing at the title THIS IS NOT LAND ART with his stick.  
© Hamish Fulton [Fair Use]  
From: [https://31.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_m2dgav3lmx1rnyjya.jpg](https://31.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m2dgav3lmx1rnyjya.jpg)

Another, younger walking artist who's walking practice creates secondary or additional art is Sarah Cullen, who developed a device that has a pencil-pendulum which notes her every movements and rhythms on the walks she takes through a city and it thereby creates maps. She made her own maps but also invited others to create their maps on walks using her device. The level of abstraction has some authors call her drawings 'anti-maps' and therein probably lies her claim to walking as a form of art (Collier & Morrison-Bell, 2013, 52). Her walking with that device is inherently linked to the final product, the map. Her form of walking produces a specific and abstract iconography. Indeed, several artists search for ways of representing their walks visually. To a certain extent Sarah Cullon's work is similar to those artists gleaning images of physiological processes in art and science collaborations<sup>44</sup>. Or even similar to the illustration of sophisticated statistical data. A desire to make the ephemeral character of walking manifest, to lock it onto paper, to see it. Absent from the original form-giving walk, the viewer of the picture will interpret with his/her own references in the clean white gallery space.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For a sample of artists working in that way see the publication accompanying an exhibition called *Genipulation* about artists working on the intersection of science and art (Denaro 2009).

<sup>45</sup> In contrast, soundwalking allows the spectator-listener-perceiver-walker to confront the context of space and society while walking. Nonetheless, a beauty vibrates from these materializations that touches on the desire to see life happening.



*The City as Written by the City*  
© Sarah Cullen, 2004 [Fair Use]  
From: [sarahvbcullen.tumblr.com/thecityaswrittenbythecity](http://sarahvbcullen.tumblr.com/thecityaswrittenbythecity)

In the course of the aestheticization of society academia, as well, has seen a wave of aestheticization. Recent interests in the pedagogies and work techniques of creative disciplines such as architecture (usually referred to as ‘Design Thinking’, as introduced by Peter Rowe in the 1990s, (Rowe 1998)) have brought forth not only an increasing interest in the aesthetics of

knowledge production but almost an expectation to proceed and present research with an aesthetic dimension – which is most often implemented through an increase in images used both during research and presentation. The example of British anthropologist Sara Pink demonstrates how problematic an all too quick reference to the use of ‘art’ can be. She categorizes her scholarship within a sensory and visual anthropology. Regarding the sensory aspect she has a fierce critique in more critical anthropologists who theorize the senses as socially co-constructed with varying meaning attached to sensory categories rather than being uniquely physiological tools with set meanings. Similarly, visual anthropology needs more than additional image production to contribute to the visual aspect in the quest for knowledge.<sup>46</sup>



FIGURE 3. My camera was drawn to the ground under foot. Video still © Sarah Pink 2006.

Video still from an experiment in sensory anthropology  
© Sarah Pink, 2006 [Fair Use]  
From: “Walking With Video”, *Visual Studies* (Pink, 2007, 242)

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<sup>46</sup> I discuss this debate between different sensory anthropologists earlier in this dissertation, in Part I, as well as a debate about the reflexivity of visual anthropology.

Pink's understanding is probably best illustrated by her piece 'Walking with Video' which combines an embodied research method of walking with the use of video. It leaves the reader puzzled over the actual interest of the endeavor as the current vocabulary of cultural geography and planning is used programmatically but without content, or to paraphrase Pink, without actual sense made: "In this context video is not merely a method of audio-visually recording people and physical settings. Rather, as I shall elaborate in this article, walking with video provides ways of (to paraphrase Feld and Basso) sensing place, placing senses, sensorially making place and making sense of place." (Pink, 2007, 243) Granted, new approaches need time to experiment and to develop, but the lack of theoretical construction at the outset (combined with the lack of artistic skill in using a camera) appears to be building a path leading nowhere. If sensing place through the electronic medium of the camera is the topic, the human/media interaction or translation might need to be considered.

## Autobiography

Within the social sciences there has been an explosion of autobiographical approaches lately. Some lean on ethnography, others on documentary art, others on literature. One example is the discovery of personal story by human geography:

"Interest in story and narrative can be discerned across a broad spectrum of human geographical writing. Geographers working within feminist, cultural, historical, economic, and environmental traditions, and drawing on actor-network, posthumanist, phenomenological, non-representational, political-economic, feminist, and postcolonial theories have all taken an interest in 'story' in recent years" (Cameron, 2012, 2).

As a postmodern feature, autobiography can be understood as just another movement away from deterministic grand theories and towards the subjective and individual. Ethnography has

used personal story for a long time. However, criticizing the development of non-reflective accounts French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu states:

“It will quickly be clear that I have little sympathy with what Clifford Geertz calls, after Roland Barthes, ‘the diary disease’, an explosion of narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism, which came in the wake of, and in reaction to, long years of positivist repression.” (Bourdieu, 2003, 282)

In combining ethnographic and autobiographic approaches with scientific ambitions, the outcomes are sometimes painful to read. An overpowering trust in phenomenology’s path to the truth turns anyone off who has the slightest contextual awareness. It is the same for self-dominated art, if there is nothing to resound or reflect upon in the overpowering presence of the author/artist’s sensations, the work indeed belongs into a diary. But autobiography is an important and fruitful place to start out artistic projects, indeed, many artists’ first works are autobiographical, as if a psychogeographical cleanup was necessary at the beginning of one’s creative path.

The postmodern baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Autobiography and stories of other people’s biographies have always been an abundant source for research and art alike. Carefully constructed research or art that is based on autobiographical work is often highly insightful or inspiring for both the maker and the receiver. British artist-scholar Deirdre Heddon refers to the notion of ‘autotopography’ (coined by Jennifer Gonzalez) which also describes much of her own work, some of which is performance, some of which is walking, or both:

“[A]utotopography is writing place through self (and simultaneously writing self through place), [. . .] autotopography, like autobiography, is a creative act of seeing, interpretation and invention, all of which depend on where you are standing, when and for what purpose” (Heddon 2008).

In research, a collection of stories from interviewees needs to be put into a theoretical framework in order to yield some interest or insight. Similarly, the walking artist can craft a dramaturgy around his/her autobiography or other people’s collected stories. Walking as art

really has a stance as art form if the writing of the story is written and “staged”<sup>47</sup> so as to create that insightful distance between story, landscape and the audience’s reality. What is more, through the very geo-geographical character of autotopography or of autobiographic walking, the subjective and cultural dimension of the landscape or the built environment, even interior space, can be played with and worked out too.

The artists and researchers presented above are all searching for and building new ground for reflection and knowledge production to take place. Postmodernity with its array of ‘turns’ (the spatial turn, the performative turn, ...) has engendered these new paths together with an inherent yearning for physical and mental capacity, for impact, for the possibility of creation, agency in a very practical way. Walking represents a response to this modern yearning of controlled bodies and minds, coming out full throttle in postmodernity. Modernity’s ‘promise of happiness’ is interpreted by some scholars as the achievement of a state of embodied mind (Fischer-Lichte 2004). Walking as art takes up this promise – or the yearning for it – by working with the physical and intellectual capacities at the same time. Suggesting walking as research method very clearly takes up this project. And the various forms of walking conceived as art presented above all work with it in one way or another. There is an emancipatory aspect conceive of walking as art form, a wish to overcome limitations of the use of the body and the mind within oneself, as well as overcoming the spatial and disciplinary (as in academic disciplines) limits of art and science. Some forms of art walking, and I will develop further ideas on the form of audio-walking in the next section, participate in the re-uniting of art and science. Not in the way we observe it in current arts initiatives at universities worldwide. But in a way that believes in a tradition of art

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<sup>47</sup> “Staged” is used for lack of a better term. The practice of ‘mise en scène’, ‘inszenieren’, means the dramaturgical and art-specific construction of the material, this does not necessarily have to take place on a stage, for art walking happens mostly in specific sites, indoors or outdoors or both. One of Janet Cardiff’s video walks called *Ghost Walk* (sort of a soundwalk guided by a handheld video-device with image and sound) took place in all possible rooms and hallways and even the attic of a theatre (at the Hebbel Theater in Berlin, Germany in 2005), but not on stage. Staging in this sense of mise-en-scène or inszenieren means pulling things together under a concept or an aesthetic form, it means organizing it clearly, ultimately it is part of the process of aesthetic sublimation.

that has a certain expectation of truth, and this starts in understanding art as inherently societal: “Aber an den ästhetischen Bildern ist gerade, was dem Ich sich entzieht, ihr Kollektives: damit wohnt Gesellschaft dem Wahrheitsgehalt inne. Das Erscheinende, wodurch das Kunstwerk das bloße Subjekt hoch überragt, ist der Durchbruch seines kollektiven Wesens.”<sup>48</sup> (Adorno, 1970, 4044) It is not the obviously social elements of reality added to art that are interestingly social, but rather the intrinsic, immanent social dimension must be considered, the one that is there even without the artist knowing it.

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<sup>48</sup> Translation: In aesthetic images it is what escapes the I, the collective: thereby society is part and parcel of the truth content. What appears, and whereby the work of art surmounts the subject, is the breaking through of its collective essence.

## 2.2. Audio-Walks – Towards an Aesthetic Form

I discussed the immanence of society in art and looking at a sample of walking art forms in their relation to postmodern tendencies present in art and science, as well as at their relation to postmodernity as a whole, encompassing current society with its mode of production, its culture, its underlying imaginaries and yearnings. Now let's turn the attention to a particular form of art walking: the audio-walk. Audio-walks exist in various formats. There are soundwalks, soundscapes and many other variations (McCartney 2014). What they share in common is the fact that they are recorded sound compositions that someone else (audience, listener, walker) can listen to and go for a walk with, for the most part on a distinct route. These compositions can take various formats. There is, for example, the 1-person narrated guide which leads you from A to B to C while narrating stories or facts about these places – commonly known from museums or tourist guides. The sound compositions can become more or less complex, with other voices of interviewees or contributors added to it, as well as elements which can be independent from the time and space in which the walker finds himself or herself: music, enactment, information, songs, radio, background noises, steps, sound effects, other storylines... anything that can be transmitted through a sound composition. The walker can be addressed directly as in "Please follow me through this blue door." or s/he can be listening in to a composition, almost like reading a journal or overhearing someone's spoken thoughts and associations. While the suction of good composition can be such that one almost dives into that world coming through the headphones, the audio-walk always leaves space to oscillate between realities, since the very fact of walking keeps theatrical illusion at bay. The combination of several storylines and levels of reality (e.g. documentary information on the environment and history, a fictitious story, and walking directions) will hold the audience's attention as well as

invite it to participate, necessarily, and thereby oscillate between realities – an activity of art reception known as interpretive space and opportunity to reflect. Meditative walking can have an effect of encouraging one to drift away, and at times this might be a dramaturgically desired thing. A sequence of facts or physical challenges will bring back the attention to the here and now. A crescendo of the unwinding of the plot will draw the attention to the dramaturgy.

The author of the audio-walk can play with its audience and make sure there is enough space for their own interpretation and imagination – after all, this is why we confront ourselves with art, to meditate, to mirror, to reflect.

In order to do so, I discuss the artistic and social context in which soundwalks are happening, and I will speak about the artistic aspect of postmodernity, or postmodernity's effect on art. In theatre and performance studies, postmodern performing arts are debated for their controversial artistic contribution – similar to the epistemological debates about postmodern approaches within the social sciences. Some scholars and theatre makers see great potential in postmodern approaches, others criticize their lack of rupture with the 'logic of late capitalism' or simply the lack of emancipation from the current overall culture which they claim to explore and critique. The biggest critique to postmodern performing arts is that they do not offer any space for interpretation to the audience, space in which the existing can be reflected and new things can be imagined – a core element of art production and reception. Rather, it is criticized, that postmodern artists work within the postmodern mindset of fragmentation and resignation, giving up aesthetic forms as vehicle of artistic creation and reception, and thereby only affirming the societal status quo, and corroborating a certain disillusion about the enlightened, modern promise of happiness through progress, reason and (intellectual, artistic) independence.

In the entire Part II of my dissertation I look for a new aesthetic form of art walking. I will speak about the role of aesthetic form later in this section. I see great potential in walking as art to produce an aesthetic form that can constructively and critically work with postmodern elements

(such as a focus on space and place, fragmented story-telling or audience co-creation, for instance) and compose them such that the piece can develop dramatic drive and open up space for imagination rather than resignation. I see the artistic force of audio-walks lying in its working with these elements and embedding them into the aesthetic form of the audio-walk such that the work (and the audience...) does not fall prey to the postmodern deceit described by critics of postmodern art (Bernstein 1991b; Jameson 1998), nor to an illusion of critique and lack of space for interpretation. Resignation and copying of postmodern trends would lead to the end of art through an incapacity of sublimation and a celebration of desublimated desires on the empirical everyday bottom of life's possibilities (Stegemann 2009; Marcuse 1972). Rather, I would like to adopt the position that there cannot be an end to art as long as there is human desire to go further, to collaborate, to civilize, to sublimate the crude and raw in us. I see strong potential in audio-walking to create a new, contemporary aesthetic form that – although working with postmodern features such as fragmentation and the irruption of the real<sup>49</sup> – can wrestle the contemporary struggles between the dominant power structures and their deceitful affirmation into an aesthetic form that inherently requires sublimation of real-world issues (violence, fear, domination, humiliation, frustration, revenge, and so on) and that offers space for perception and thought outside of these dominant structures. The magic of the aesthetic form is to be able to transcend the empirical through free artistic speculation<sup>50</sup> rather than through religious, economic or other biased ideologies.

In this spirit, this section understands the audio-walk in its postmodern context with its distinct challenges and potential. The ideal aesthetic form leading out of the postmodern conundrum treats its audience with respect and assumes its maturity (Adorno: 'Mündigkeit' (T. W. Adorno

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<sup>49</sup> For typologies of such features see these standard works in theatre studies (Lehmann 2006; Fischer-Lichte 2012; Fischer-Lichte 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Just as theoretical speculation offers new paths for knowledge. In both cases, in art and in science, I do not refer to freedom as an absolute term. Freedom is always relative, we do live in social structures and relations, and freedom always stands in relation to those existing environments. The more we know about them, the more we can liberally think about and act on them.

2006)) in terms of the ability of aesthetic perception and intellectual processing: The audience is not insulted and fed clichés and established values to hang on to, nor is it humiliated in its desire to make sense and to find space to transcend the empirical through the aesthetic demands of the piece, and to have a good time while doing this. Rather, the audience is given the opportunity to accompany the artist's physical and mental walk through a topic and place, just as one goes for a walk with a good friend to talk and listen, and to take in the view or the fresh air, in order to return inspired with new insights or questions to explore. Just as the walk with a friend can be like stepping out through a door into a different space and time for a moment and reflect upon one's reality behind that door, the audio-walk can offer that active confrontation by inviting the audience to join in with its aesthetic form, its oscillating between fiction and reality, its sensory and intellectual processing of issues, and find space for interpretation and imagination. Theodor Adorno heavily criticized the Culture Industry for its tendency to limit that space and to fill it up with given values and interpretations which pleasantly makes alienation and travail under capitalism and modernity bearable. Much rather he would have a work of art let him „roam freely in imagination“ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100).

## The Performative Turn

I analyze soundwalking or audio-walking and its ability to steer out of the cul-de-sac into which much of Western theatre art has maneuvered itself in the last couple of decades. I consider it helpful to analyze audio-walking through the theoretical means of theatre studies as audio-walking shares many general elements with theatre: story, dramaturgy, combining aesthetic elements, a live or almost live artist-audience relation, creating a space and time for the audience to dive into another reality without abandoning its own reality. Audio-walking joins

forms which are kindred to theatre: documentary, installation, performance, the creative non-fiction genre... all theatrical arts in their ability to tell a story and to offer space for perception and thought to an audience.

## Action, Time and Place

Since the 1960s and certainly the 1970s, a wave of curious artists has stirred up the common rules and formats of art, especially in the visual and the performing arts (theatre, dance, film, adding performance, video and installations). The Aristotelian unity of action, time and place as formulated in his *Poetics* are challenged by contemporary developments reaching from academic tendencies for deconstruction to technological virtuality and its overcoming of our temporal and spatial limitations, to theorization of the body regarding its social construction as well as its co-construction of the social. It can be argued that the postmodern tendencies in the performing arts have roots that reach back deep into Enlightenment and Modernity, as the liberation from the domination by the church and religious beliefs brought with it a desire to liberate not only the mind but also the body from its pudeur and imposed incapacities through religious control or through labor conditions and new social hierarchies. There is a price to pay for liberation through Enlightenment. Critical theory famously states that Modernity took a path to implement Enlightenment's principles which only led to new social myths and forms of domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002).

In terms of the realization of modernity through embodiment of the new social context, the modern project with reason and technology geared to progress has brought on a different control of the body. Throughout epochs and societies, the body is the site of social control, of power struggles, embodying social hierarchies and professional deformations as well as gender values and control. Together with the great achievements of public health, modernity has also

brought new sufferings and conditions to our bodies which are the vehicles of social distinction, consciously or unconsciously. This social constructedness of the body's habitus is also the reason for its capacity of change. From religious to class restraints, from farming to industrial wounds, the modern body's context allowed for speculations of possible change: Dance and theatre reflect the unfettering of the body from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century on, parallel to other utopian, alternative or pedagogical movements focusing on the body and its capacities<sup>51</sup>. One of the leading German theatre scholars, Erika Fischer-Lichte, traces back the beginnings of postmodern tendencies through practices of the body in theatre to Max Reinhardt's staging of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Sophocles' *Electra* in 1903 at the Kleines Theater Berlin, featuring Gertrud Eysoldt as an extraordinarily physical Electra (Fischer-Lichte 2012), breaking with the dominant rules and boundaries of acting and the use of the body at the time. Her performance was vividly discussed in the media, mobilizing both conservative and progressive voices.

## The Notion of Performative

The notion 'performative' has only come into heavy usage in linguistics, social science and theatre studies after the 1950s. It is said that the linguist John L. Austin actually introduced the notion 'performative' in his speech act theory (Austin 1975). Judith Butler wrote a seminal essay on the constitution of gender (and identity in general) through performative acts of embodiment. Similarly to acting, identity is shaped by physical acts; the version I have of her essay was published in 'Theatre Journal'. However, her conception of enactment or performance cannot be fully adapted to the aesthetic situation of theatre or even of performance, as her studies regard

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<sup>51</sup> Think of the utopian center at the Monte Verità in Ticino in Switzerland which drew artists, bohemians and other unique characters for many decades to its site. Or think of the way of life in the communities around the Bauhaus or Frank Lloyd Wright. Or think of the pedagogies of Maria Montessori or Rudolf Steiner and his anthroposophic program.

the construction and reproduction of gender identity in the everyday. Both Austin and Butler consider their performative acts (of speech, of embodiment) as performances in public, performance which (re-)establish a situation or an identity. But neither of them fully discusses the character of performance in the aesthetic sense and therefore theatre scholars justify the development of an aesthetic theory of performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2004, 41). The proximity of these thoughts on the performative to performance art or Aktionskunst which has developed since the 1960 (led by artist Marina Abramovic) is established through the performative character of performance art, in the sense that these art events play with the creation and modification of dominant traditions, identities, roles and dramaturgies just as the performative acts of Austin and Butler create and change historic and social situations and identities. Butler emphasizes that her approach shows that gender identity is constituted through performative acts and can therefore be modified: "In its [gender identity's] very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status." (Butler, 1988, 520) Theatre studies have started to use the notion of performative and performance in their attempts to theorize the developments in the 1960s and 1970s through artists such as Marina Abramovich. The act of performance is central as it is understood in its capacity to create a social situation, even an institution. And the body plays a major role in the realization of the performative act:

In other words, the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation. To do, to dramatize, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment. This doing of gender is not merely a way in which embodied agents are exterior, surfaced, open to the perception of others. Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies or what Sartre would perhaps have called a style of being or Foucault, 'a stylistics of existence'. This style is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities. (Butler, 1988, 521)

Similarly, the fragmentation of time in postmodern theatre can be read as a reaction to the increased control and scheduling of time through the creation of large masses of factory workers who follow precise shifts and live in a separation between work time and leisure time. But time is

further uprooted through a globalized culture that never sleeps. Place is played with in postmodern art as people become increasingly mobile and distances are covered faster and faster.

## Detaching Signifier and Signified

The artists from the 1960s and 1970s confronted the audience with unusual formats in which the role of the audience suddenly was not clear anymore. Should it react within the aesthetic realm of fiction or rather within the present reality which demanded a moral or ethical reaction? Performances such as 'Lips of Thomas' by Marina Abramovich in which she exposed herself to tremendous physical strain challenged the audience which ultimately carried the bleeding woman away to seek help. Was this fiction, was this fact, and how should this be read? Any attempts to make sense and interpret the cross, the blood, the wine she used in this performance was taken over by the immediate effect of her action. These actions were primarily 'self-referential', they were exactly and only what they did and not some signifier within a logos determining its signified. The spectators reacted to the very materiality of the situation and contributed to the performance, their reactions were reality-building actions. In performance art, what the performers do effects the spectators and vice versa. Fischer-Lichte calls this the 'feedback loop'. So, the performative turn redefined two relations: the one between spectator and performer, and the one between signifier and signified, the body/material and the sign. This can be read as if in classical drama the audience could just lay back and take an emotional bath that would lead to an automatic catharsis. This might be true for a blockbuster movie or a musical in which one is manipulated such that tears flow and basic emotions are touched to be rearranged into the standard setting needed for these movies and stories (and societies) to work. If we can still presuppose a certain aesthetic education, a curiosity and a capacity to think, then it is clear that the classical drama is not that deterministic brain-washing institution that many postmodern performance enthusiasts say it is.

## Media Collapse

Media and virtual realities play an important role both in the context of art and in the making and presenting of contemporary art. The force of the here and now might seem antiquated by how the media is overruling human presence, capacity and scale. The younger generations are nicknamed the 'digitally native' and it is rumored that they have different capacities than the older generations when it comes to being present in several realities/times/spaces at the same time.

On stage, the play with the digital image and the juxtaposition of times and spaces is problematic. Bodies get lost and vanish in meaninglessness. The image (projected, streamed from the other side of the world, heard or represented as code,...) easily outrules the traditional actor who is flattened and crushed by these means. Confronted with the screen and other technological elements, the stage actor can only refer to techniques known from the so criticized and so copied Hollywood cinema to try and blow up his/her presence. It is a US-American theatre company (Big Art Group) who brought this issue up over ten years ago in a piece called 'House of No More' which I saw in Germany and which was described by the mesmerized critics as presenting a gigantic 'media collapse'. I briefly want to touch on the question if this piece was affirmative art, only representing what was already happening, or if it offered space to analyze the media situation. The piece starts out as a 'who-dunnit' and the audience starts to follow a plot. But it ends in a labyrinth of information broadcast through a web of different media such that it is impossible to grasp any thread of story anymore, the audience now dangling from one loose and thin thread of spectacular information to another. A media collapse. Clearly, one understands, a critique of information society. At the same time, the director and the actors were enamored with the spectacular aspects of the piece. And so was the audience. It is difficult not to succumb to the flashy stimuli of stage effects, despite the fact that they showed, in postmodern fashion, how the blue screen and other effects were made (see image). The audience wanted to connect the dots of the story on the big screen hung behind the laboring

actors who were in a double role as they performed both on stage and for the screen. But the piece unfolded in a way that the very desire to connect the dots was disappointed. The only conclusion to be drawn was to say: we live in a terrible media society; but I was taken in by the spectacular show. A little and obvious critique was brought in, but the status quo was confirmed through the entertainment factor of the spectacular, the force of the individual image which filled every possible space, there was no space left at the end to see a connection between the images and understand the bigger societal whole, or to fill space with one's own thoughts, with alternatives. Bottom line: there is no alternative to this society.



The "Real Time Film" theatre piece *House of No More*  
© Big Art Group, 2004 [Fair Use]  
From: <http://bigartgroup.com/work/house-of-no-more/>

Regarding the influence of media on our society and on art, some theatre scholars, such as Erika Fischer-Lichte and Hans-Thies Lehmann, place a lot of responsibility on the audience and expect it to be able to oscillate productively between the formats, the story lines, the various media, the realities, the orders of things, etc. such that a perceptive multi-stability ('perzeptive Multistabilität') can be achieved with Fischer-Lichte. To overcome the deception and 'disjointedness' of the different media and current ways of perceiving and thinking, Lehmann hopes for a new 'politics of perception' ('Wahrnehmungspolitik') which, however, depends heavily on the audience's aesthetic and intellectual capacity of co-creation and on an 'aesthetics of responsibility' or 'response-ability' ('Ästhetik der Verantwortung'):

The basic structure of perception mediated by media is such that there is no experience of a connection among the individual images received but above all no connection between the receiving and sending of signs; there is no experience of a relation between address and answer. Theatre can respond to this only with a politics of perception, which could at the same time be called an aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability). Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, it can move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception. Such an experience would be not only aesthetic but therein at the same time ethico-political. All else, even the most perfected political demonstration, would not escape Baudrillard's diagnosis that we are dealing only with circulating simulacra. (Lehmann, 2006, 185-186)

These suggestions show just how important for personal and social autonomy it is to offer aesthetic education at home and in schools. The sheer lack of aesthetic capacity, of reading and interpreting a piece without shattering it by searching for empirical evidence of a causal effect that the story resolves, is shocking today<sup>52</sup>. Moreover, not being able to contextualize what one sees, to contextualize art and to understand its historic, political, social etc. heritage, makes the

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<sup>52</sup> I had a student ask me in a theatre history class if Bertolt Brecht had had a bad childhood experience that made him hate capitalism.

ground for contemporary art even more unfertile. It becomes all the more important to educate the 'digitally native' as well as the digitally bedazzled with analogue knowledge and capacities. Audio-walks, as an aesthetic form to experience as audience as well as to make as a student, could offer a way out of this situation in which art is essentially becoming anti-art.

## Is It Anti-Art?

How is art becoming anti-art? Postmodern theatre breaks with classic Aristotelian unity of action, time and place in dramatic theatre which suggests that there is 1) a main plot without too many subplots, 2) that there are no major jumps in time nor a too long time-span covered, and that 3) there are no major jumps between location either, rather the play should happen in one place (with sub-places like distinct rooms, of course). Already Bertolt Brecht broke with these rules in an attempt to stimulate the audience's mind and active insight through having to actively follow and put together the structure of the story. But Brecht still followed the rules of aesthetic form, the drama, the play, as he knew about the importance of aesthetic and interpretive freedom it actually bears. Expressionism, Dada and Surrealism all opposed aesthetic form, the strict following of verse or acts, criticizing it for its bourgeois character, while totally misjudging the power that lies in working with them:

I observe that I am beginning to become a classic. Those extreme forced efforts [of expressionism] to spew forth with all means certain (banal or soon to be banal) content! One blames the classics for their service to form and overlooks that it is the form which is the servant here." (Brecht, 1975, 138 quoted and translated by Marcuse, 1978, 43)

In their misjudgment of the power of art they actually created anti-art. And the hope of criticizing the broader society with their work really only leads to an affirmation of the status quo. Similarly, postmodern and postdramatic theatre, only mirrors fragmented society and, worse, the mindset,

the imaginative limits of postmodernity. It thereby creates disappointment, frustration and violence which is performed but not sublimated, the audience has no space to transcend and speculate about other perspectives. Performances become more and more violent, people's desublimated desires and fears as well, in a spiral that accelerates frustration. The deceit can be felt but not dealt with. The potential of a contemporary 'revolutionary subject' is scarce because there is no alternative to turn to through rebellion.

Without the constraint of form, which dictated the path of sublimation, desublimated desires find themselves set against the same illusory comforts and real obstacles to happiness as precipitated the need for desublimation in the first instance. The culture industry's response is the production of works, typified in the new architecture, that, through a mimesis of aestheticization, indict the spectator for failing to find gratification where there is none. The release from the rigors of form into the apparent utopian play of differences should have produced a sublime release from the repressions of everyday life under capital and the only illusory dynamic of high culture. Instead, the postmodern sublime (the sublime defeat of the a priori of closed forms), through its aggressive insistence on overcoming the divide between high and low, and integrating art and empirical life, perpetuates the sublime's violent repression of desire without the concomitant moment of release. By this route postmodernism's presumptive affirmation, by offering what is repression as satisfaction, makes the moment of self-negation permanent and thus an unintended celebration of death. Because postmodernist practice alters the empirical worlds without transforming it, its abstract affirmations belie the despair that sustains it. That despair manifests itself in aggression and violence, a violence now represented, exploited and celebrated in the media. The violence perpetuated by instrumental reason on sensuous particularity, what Adorno terms the 'non-identical', is answered only with violence. (Bernstein, 1991, 25)

Hans-Thies Lehmann, German theatre scholar, wrote a description of contemporary theatre in the 1990s in an attempt to grasp and to start to theorize what theatres had been staging for a good two decades. Others have written about the phenomenon of postmodern theatre as well, but his is the most encompassing work that can figure almost as a reference on styles and

formats but also offers a historical elaboration of the phenomenon and opens up to quo vadis questions of theatre art (in its English translation, Lehmann, 2006).

Bernd Stegemann, prolific German dramaturg and professor at one of the most renowned drama schools criticizes Lehmann for cementing the features of postmodern or postdramatic theatre through this book, as most theatre scholars and makers follow it as a how-to handbook rather than as a critical analysis (in its American translation, Stegemann, 2009).

## On Postdramatic Theatre

What is postdramatic theatre? The notion was brought into existence through theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann in the 1990s. It tries to grasp observations on contemporary theatre developments since the 1970s through which performance art has developed and theatre itself has opened up to other dramaturgical approaches than the Aristotelian unity of action, time and place, and their reference to a shared closed value system. Post-dramatic is used as a term to describe just that distancing from the classical dramatic structure. It marks the rupture with drama as an aesthetic form guiding playwriting and the staging of new and existing work. From a sociological or anthropological view, postdramatic theatre forms mirror the postmodern fragmented society. Moreover, postdramatic theatre wants to go against the bourgeois 'theatre of illusion' (immersion into a story in a dark proscenium theatre or like in Hollywood cinema) which happens, technically, through the dramatic structure, the dramatic situation created through the characters of the play. Again, this is criticizing Aristotle's catharsis that manipulates people's feelings for the reproduction of values. Postdramatic theatre therefore has started to use different aesthetic forms, one act plays with fragmentation of the story so as to mirror the fragmentation of our societies and cultures down to our globalized and virtualized everyday. The audience is left to put together the pieces but it is also told that this action is in vain, or worse, a

remnant of bourgeois believe in sense and direction. Apart from its deceitful essence (criticized as such by critical theorists and some dramaturgs, but most of the theatre scene produces and reproduces this depressing trend), postdramatic theatre has brought forth an astonishing amount of formats and aesthetics that are technically very exciting. This potential should not be overlooked in a critique. Rather, after three decades of performance and the consequential postdramatic theatre, it is time to come up with new aesthetic forms that bring back the force of art to sublimate and transcend *and* work with postmodernity as context and artistic technique. The audio-walk appears to offer fertile ground for such an experiment.

Not only the socio-economic context is a big influence on art, the very force of trends in visual and performing arts can be understood as a dominating structure as well, which limits the space for new orientation and content just as much as the dominant societal structure it claims to work against. Worse, such trends (normalized through art schools and juries) might start to reflect the dominant superstructure, as Pierre Bourdieu argued in his studies of the artistic and of the scientific fields (Bourdieu 1975b; Bourdieu 1991b). Bourdieu ascribed this to the lack of epistemological rigor on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the structure and dynamics of the scientific and artistic fields, themselves dominated by the economic field<sup>53</sup>.

The critique of postmodern art circles around this problem. Postmodern forms of theatre are very prominent in the German speaking countries, Germany, Switzerland, Austria. At the same time theatre and performing arts are and have always had a very strong presence there, artistic production is prolific and experimental – certainly fueled by extensive public funding for the performing arts. It is without exaggeration or arrogance that one can say that theatre, dance and performance is considered at the forefront in those countries, as well as in the surrounding countries such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK, who all have a long tradition of theatre and dance production as well an interested, educated audience. Through the close

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<sup>53</sup> 'Field' is a concept of Bourdieu's describing a certain social system or set of relations.

collaborations by artists from these countries (and others from throughout the world but mainly the New Worlds and Eastern Europe) and their coming together at numerous festivals with the same juries, the contemporary trends have been mainstreamed (or globalized). In my work in the field of theatre I have travelled extensively to theatre festivals throughout Europe and a tendency for everyone to adopt similar trends became stronger and stronger. Grants from the richer countries opened up to include Eastern European companies, which was probably the best example through which to see the mainstreaming of art into dominant trends that everyone adopted to get into those strongly funded circles. Interestingly, theatre in the USA shows very little signs of postmodern trends (dance a bit less so since a number of influential postmodern dancers and choreographers actually are US-American, such as Trisha Brown, Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs). And the music of Philip Glass is known for its ignition of postmodern developments in music. In theatre, it is US director Robert Wilson who, together with Philip Glass, featuring Lucinda Childs as performer, famously produced *Einstein on the Beach*, an early precursor of postdramatic theatre. Wilson has since retreated to well-funded Germany, where he has prolifically worked at the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht's former theatre. Despite these strong original contributions, today, apart from certain New York companies or traveling companies, US theatre either has its own interpretation of postmodernity or shows only very few signs of the time. Most dramaturgy follows the classical, dramatic form, costumes and make-up are used extensively, the staging works hard to achieve catharsis (or at least a couple of tears) in the audience.<sup>54</sup>

Looking at the features and problems of postmodern performing arts, to which I count soundwalking or audio-walking, is helpful here to work out the argument: that against the trend of fragmentation and loose ends as present in postmodern, especially postdramatic performing

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<sup>54</sup> This is not something I am going to explore in this dissertation, but the question why American theatre, in comparison to European theatre, is either oriented towards the past or finds its own contemporary forms is one I would like to explore further. What is it in the American understanding of art, both from the artist's as well as the audience's viewpoint, that has diverted American theatre from continuing the postdramatic path. Again, this exploration would take place in the spirit of understanding theatre as inherently social and political.

art, audio-walks might constitute a new aesthetic form. An aesthetic form that assembles postmodern elements anew into the form of the audio-walk, which, despite the postmodern elements, allows for dialectical experience and critique (imagination!). This then is an aesthetic form which is contemporary, immanently social, but without succumbing to the very logic of postmodernity that would not leave much room for interpretation. On the contrary, through the combination of elements from fiction to documentary, it leaves room to oscillate between dramatization and reality which is the very essence of the aesthetic experience and without which art is no more. Walking as art moves in this context, its elements as well as its traps and potential can only be understood if we know a little about postmodern art.

Art has a difficult stance today. The dialectic of Enlightenment unfolds such that reason and magic are entrenched in a seemingly unsolvable competition and dispute. Art is at the very center of that dispute as it reflects both our desire for transcendence and spirituality as well as for explanation and problem solving on our way to discover the truth(s). Today, art is not only highly desired for its promising financial outcomes as an investment (think of the commercial art fairs such as Art Basel, or even the more artistically but event-like Biennale di Venezia). The desire is also fueled by what is magic, spiritual, intellectual, more than emotional. But there is no space for these dimensions in a modern society of reason, objectivity and progress. Going back and forth, the *raison d'être* for art is contested.

In der entzauberten Welt ist, ohne daß sie es sich eingestünde, das Faktum Kunst ein Skandalon, Nachbild des Zaubers, den sie nicht duldet. Nimmt jedoch Kunst das unerschütterlich in Kauf, setzt sie sich blind als den Zauber, so erniedrigt sie sich zum Illusionsakt wider den eigenen Anspruch auf Wahrheit und unterminiert sich erst recht.<sup>55</sup> (Adorno, 1970, 3869-3870)

At the same time that this undermining takes place, society experiences an aestheticization. It is without content, however, only venerated for the sign of long gone access to content through

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<sup>55</sup> Translation: Within the disenchanting world, the very fact of art, without admitting it to itself, is a scandal, afterimage of the magic which the disenchanting world does not tolerate. If art accepts this nonetheless, it humiliates itself to an act of illusion against its own expectation of truth and thereby undermines itself even more so.

these aesthetic means. But art and knowledge, magic and truth, have been disconnected. Regarding postmodern art, Adorno's insights can be read as further development of the magic-truth dispute happening within art and of this disconnection of knowledge and art, of science and art. I suggest audio-walks as a format that seeks to recombine knowledge and art, reason and magic. With the risk of succumbing to the dangers of montage and construction, which lies in the mere addition of closed elements without achieving an artistic bridge between them to form a bigger whole, I see potential in making audio-walks today in the yearning for a reason and magic searching combination of Geist and Soul.

In it in this context, that I analyze audio-walks as a seed planted into postmodern ground, with postmodern features, but with the potential of change inside the seed. Understanding postmodern, postdramatic trends allows to work out the wiggle room of new forms. Audio-walking has artistic as well as pedagogical values. Used in educational settings, the aesthetic education and artistic experience of making audio-walks is an empowering process for students.

## Audio-Walks as Aesthetic Form

As mentioned earlier, postmodern tendencies in theatre and in art in general can be traced back to as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, maybe they are inherently modern tendencies, but this is a different debate and shall not be touched on here. Rather, for the sake of argumentation, 'postmodern' is used here to describe a sort of contemporary art, set somewhere between theatre and visual art. Theatre and visual arts experienced the biggest stirrings and changes starting from the 1960s and 1970s, where so called 'performances' started to happen in unconventional places, not live on theatre stages, not framed and silent in a gallery.

Dancers and actors moving outside and doing site-specific performances was one aspect, and Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* in 1970, described earlier in this dissertation, is a most prominent example. Aktionskunst (action art) and performances happened in galleries where the physical moved to the forefront, the bodily urge and direct experience hic et nunc mattered more than the process of sublimation and interpretation that theatre and visual art had built over the centuries.

There are several ways to interpret this development towards more bodily action and experience both for the artist and the audience. The German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte who had worked extensively on the semantics of theatre, interprets performance art as an urge to move away from the civilized body as described by Norbert Elias in his *Process of Civilization* (Elias 1997a; Elias 1997b). Starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, she reads the initiatives for more physical freedom of movement or the first experiments on stage by courageous actors as the beginnings of a greater liberation of the body. Together with linguistic and social scientific theories on performativity and the production of situations, institutions and identity (Austin 1975; Butler 1988), Fischer-Lichte places the appearance and interpretation of performance art alongside the flow of this academic context and therefore suggests an aesthetics of the performative where she offers first attempts to describe and typologize performative features in theatre (Fischer-Lichte 2004).

## On Aesthetic Form

How can walking contribute to overcoming the postmodern despair and fulfill the (post)modern yearning described by so many authors? How can some of the postmodern features and trends be included without turning the work into a postdramatic performance? How would performative

walks need to be built in order to be a new aesthetic form in Marcuse's sense? In other and majestic words: Could art walking offer aesthetic moments of dialectical critique and imagination?

What is aesthetic form? Herbert Marcuse, leaning heavily on Adorno, describes aesthetic form as necessary for hope to shine through, for psychological and political tensions to burst and be transformed, for all sorts of tendencies and desires – good or bad – to be sublimated. Aesthetic form is material (content) that is intentionally, aesthetically, artistically stylized and thereby sublimated:

“the immediate content is stylized, the ‘data’ are reshaped and reordered in accordance with the demands of the art form, which requires that even the representation of death and destruction invoke the need for hope – a need rooted in the new consciousness embodied in the work of art.” (Marcuse, 1978, 7)

The challenge therein is to practice a dialectical critique, which requires one to be deeply inside art and refreshingly outside of it at the same time. The constructedness of audio-walks as a mixture of fiction, documentary, sound-composition as well as physical and mental participation or co-production by the audience carries the potential for this dialectical critique to happen. In order for walking to offer that aesthetic sublimation which allows us to imagine and to develop the subjective ‘non-identical’, its ‘real’ elements need to be enrobed and transported by the aesthetic form of the audio-walk:

“Aesthetic sublimation makes for the affirmative, reconciling component of art, though it is at the same time a vehicle for the critical, negating function of art. The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity.” (Marcuse, 1978, 7)

While postmodern performance wrote the rupture with aesthetic form on its banners in the belief of freeing itself from bourgeois ideology and illusion hidden inside aesthetic form and the logos

that underlies its dramaturgy, critical theory holds against this that “[t]he submission to aesthetic form is the vehicle of the nonconformist sublimation” (Marcuse, 1978, 43). The ‘irruption of the real’ (Lehmann 2006) which took hold and actually help constitute performance art and postdramatic theatre smashed the aesthetic form of drama and thereby let loose the elements of theatre which are now nothing more than random persons (instead of characters) in a random setting (instead of a dramatic situation) deliberately making random sense (if any, instead of offering space to speculate about sense).

Already Bertolt Brecht observed a tendency for artistic form to be abandoned when he stated that:

“I observe that I am beginning to become a classic. Those extreme forced efforts [of expressionism] to spew forth with all means certain (banal or soon to be banal) content! One blames the classics for their service to form and overlooks that it is the form which is the servant here.” (Brecht, 1975, 138 quoted and translated by Marcuse, 1978, 43)

While one might feel restricted through the requirements of aesthetic forms (such as a three or five act play, verse, or even the single perspective in painting), a better understanding of the mechanisms of aesthetic form might help understand the anti-form dogma of postmodern performance:

“We can tentatively define ‘aesthetic form’ as the result of the transformation of a given content (actual or historical, personal or social fact) into a self-contained whole: a poem, play, novel, etc. The work is thus ‘taken out’ of the constant process of reality and assumes a significance and truth of its own. The aesthetic transformation is achieved through a reshaping of language, perception, and understanding so that they reveal the essence of reality in its appearance: the repressed potentialities of man and nature. The work of art thus re-presents reality while accusing it. [...] The critical function of art, its contribution to the struggle for liberation, resides in the aesthetic form. A work of art is authentic or true not by virtue of its content. (i.e. the ‘correct’ representation of social conditions), nor by its ‘pure’ form, but by the content having become form.” It

can thereby produce a “negation of the realistic-conformist mind:” (Marcuse, 1978, pp. 8-9)

Herbert Marcuse, in his analysis of anti-art or non-art, at that time aimed at Marxist or Communist art, but, interestingly, a similar analysis can be made of postmodern art works: “they are mimesis without transformation” (Marcuse, 1978, 51). Or, in other words, they are affirmative, affirmative of what surrounds them, they simply mirror society, there is no knowledge-creating distance, no focus on content other than the reproduction of what already is in its crudeness, in its rawness, but without the option of aesthetic mediation through which the unspeakable could unfold and offer perspectives. What is needed, it appears, is mimesis *with* transformation, in order for art not to succumb to the powerful play of domination and disappointment that constitutes much of art’s context of postmodernity today. To work towards transformation is tied to a need to make sense. In classical terms catharsis is sought. Therefore, some sort of logos needs to be mobilized, referred to. This is the point of critique of anti-art and much of postmodern and postdramatic performing artists are against art that seeks transformation through the work, or that at least seeks to offer a window for imagining some sort of transformation, otherness, difference or change – despite their self-image of being critical. Sense can only be made by reference to a logos, a frame of cultural reference, a certain order. Critics of aesthetic form assume that this logos can only be the framework of dominating capitalism, patriarchy, racism and so on. And much of it certainly is. But any slight chance of subjective agency is solemnly denied. Again, postmodernism celebrates defeat. Truth is sought in the direct touch of reality. But reality on stage is not enough to create the necessary aesthetic tension for insight to happen. The confrontation with reality alone does not offer the aesthetic sublimation necessary to transcend the deep deep problems negotiated in art, the archaic tensions between the sexes, the strong and the weak, the leaders and the followers, the dominating and the dominated, and their relation with the jokers who stir things up. Aesthetic form gives a protective but transformative space to human negotiation. It is both safe and unsafe, because it is inherently transforming. As such, postmodern theatre arts are reflective of

the depolitization in Western society. While society enjoys abundance in a digital reality, and while entertainment further installs its suave repression, the political becomes a question of style and life-style, perfectly suitable for the postdramatic stage where stereotypes are floating in a vacuum without ever negotiating what is at stake, without ever fighting for the political, for the aesthetic, and without questioning the political relevance of the aesthetic form.

## Mimesis and Reality

Mimesis in art allows the audience to compare between the mirrored society and personal relations portrayed in the work on the one hand, and their own reality or their world view on the other hand.

“Experience is intensified to the breaking point; the world appears as it does for Lear and Antony, Berenice, Michael Kohlhaas, Woyzeck, as it does for the lovers of all times. They experience the world demystified. The intensification of perception can go as far as to distort things so that the unspeakable is spoken, the otherwise invisible becomes visible, and the unbearable explodes.”  
(Marcuse, 1978, 45)

By pouring the content, the very material that is represented, into an aesthetic form, such as a play, a poem, a painting, a film, a sculpture, an opera, ... the tension between what is portrayed in the form and what is the reality of the audience is aggrandized, such that it allows one to explore that space in between, compare, glimpse, turn things around in various ways... imagine.

Since the beginning of the modern period, mimesis came to mean both the function of reference to that which was to be represented, as well as to the production itself. The mimesis of the world was a work form that itself became readily apparent. This work went into creating that secondary reality that gave to the actual reality its artistic form. Thus, mimesis functioned in two directions: it represented reality in a specific form, and it gave this representation its own

reality. The historical continuum of mimesis could be examined through the represented world, as well as by the way in which it was represented. (Stegemann, 2009, 12-13)

As in the critical social sciences, the different constructed realities are laid bare, and only then can insight be gained. If the performance and the worldview are one and the same 'pensée unique', then nothing else is possible – and there is no use for art anymore. (That's anti-art) Unfortunately, this is what happens to a certain extent in postmodern performing arts.

Now the observer becomes an author of his own (artistic) story – just as in his day-to-day life – which is informed only in an illusory manner by his perception. This representation of the world has an artistic effect that aligns exactly with the postmodern worldview, with mimesis no longer portraying the world, but portraying instead a way of perceiving the world. Furthermore, the depiction is meant to be just as inscrutable as the world itself. (Stegemann, 2009, 15)

Postmodern performing arts, postmodern theatre terminates the relation between theatre and drama. Indeed, it wants no drama, accusing its reference to a logos that encompasses a distinct set of values and a certain order of things, to be reproducing the current dominant power relations. This is not a critique of the attempt to criticize the dominant power relations. On the contrary. This is an encouragement to go further. Postdramatic theatre's solution so far has been to abandon narration, drama and character. Fragmentation of reality, of character, of story, of everything appears here as in other postmodern arts. The only binding situation is the fact of being together in a room. Thereby, any attempt by the audience to make any sense and to seek agency in a character is thrown back at them as an attempt to hold on to the dominant power discourses. Lehmann caught a sense of the end of dramatic situations in these words: 'what is experienced or stylized as drama is nothing more than the blatant deceit which passes off happening as action' (Lehmann 2006). Stegemann, another German theatre scholar and maker counters:

Postdramatic theater's entire rejection of drama lies in this one damnation. The act of observing humans for the purpose of examining and understanding their

behavior and their actions is considered to be an illusion and a habituated lie. With this stroke, dramatic situations lose all legitimacy as a form through which the world can be described or translated into narrative structures. (Stegemann, 2009)

It is through making the power discourse visible through the mimesis in dramatization that it becomes fathomable. Instead, postmodern postdramatic performing arts remain in the power discourse by adopting the self-referential perception and by abandoning agency. I would like to add, that this is a tendency present also in many arts-integrated research projects where art is only used for its technique, but content is dismissed. Thereby the very *raison d'être* of art – and of the social sciences! – is nipped in the bud. It is a profound mistake, then, to accuse drama to be reproducing power, since the key to change is the grown-up adult, educated as mature citizen, readied with agency. Just as with Benjamin and the German Trauerspiel, we would need to check again what kind of audience art has today. Is it one that is mature and in search for space to imagine, or one that needs reality confirmed?<sup>56</sup>

## Walking through Postmodernity

I speak of postmodern, postdramatic (meaning: abandoning the aesthetic form of drama) performing arts as I am trying to work out the challenges posed by postmodern, postdramatic performing arts to the production of (other) performing art in this context. Various tactics are implemented in postmodern art, first and foremost the attempts to overcome the difference between high art and popular art by abandoning aesthetic form. Then the use of performance-specific means to show the very construction of the performance, the work of the performer, the

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<sup>56</sup> In his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which is not tragedy but *Trauerspiel* in German (sad play), Benjamin argued that this shift from Greek tragic drama to *Trauerspiel* mirrored a shift in the historic context and its audience, *Trauerspiel* is for sad people (*traurige Leute*) who want the sadness around confirmed in the play.

mechanisms of the stage or the site. Then the semantic disconnection of objects and their meaning (except for gross exaggerations of symbols). Pop art is a good example of the beginnings of this deconstruction and fragmentation: Images of soup cans through their alleged immediacy to reality, their affirmative mimesis, are not dissolving the difference between high art and low art, nor are they negotiating or overcoming any social hierarchy whatsoever, they might actually be increasing them. Regarding Andy Warhol, Marcuse states:

Renunciation of the aesthetic form does not cancel the difference between art and life – but it does cancel that between essence and appearance, in which the truth of art has its home and which determines the political value of art. [...] The desublimation of art can only make the artist superfluous without *democratizing* and *generalizing creativity*. (Marcuse, 1978, 51-52)

That contradiction in the discourse of the critics of aesthetic form is also seen in the reproach made to aesthetic form in theatre, cinema and performing arts. Walking as art with its everyday, aestheticized, autobiographical character can either fall into the canon of ‘anti-art’ (anti – despite the diligent work of getting published and exhibited as ‘artists’) by remaining in the DeCerteauian tactical dimension, by climbing and claiming objective heights in neo-phenomenology in which the body speaks truth as in pragmatism, by sharing personal diaries devoid of material that might resound productively in others, by wrestling social space into a container space and reducing social struggles to some essential concepts.

While much of the audience of postmodern, postdramatic theatre productions has been trained into the postmodern experience of failure and fragmentation during an evening at the theatre or at the place of a site-specific performance, some of the audience might still have the urge to make sense of the performance and believe in the agency of the characters introduced to them. The hope of agency is quickly destroyed in postdramatic performance where every thing and every person is self-referential and vain in an ever so complex world:

“The theatrical devices instead serve a deconstruction of the audience’s perception, which is believed to suffer from a lingering bad habit of seeking a

connection between character, plot, and mimesis in general. This habit is desensitized by the practice and repetition of the separation of symbols from their referents. The path to this goal is the use of unclear meanings. Anything can be separated: speech from its meaning, the body from its voice, the voice from that which is said, that which is said from its meaning, the meaning from its intention, the goal from its motivation, and so on. Based on his habit, the observer continues to want to establish a synthesis of the various theatrical elements. This is considered an aspect of the power discourse, for which he may well be punished even during the performance.” (Stegemann, 2009, 18)

In this set up, the only insight that can be made is the one that the world has become a terribly complex place and that it is dangerous to make any sense of it since one might reproduce the dominant rule – giving in in that way annihilates any room for change, any room for agency and thereby really reproduces the dominant rule and leaves people depressingly disappointed. The promise of happiness remains unfulfilled and there is no other promise sought, no other happiness imagined, since nothing really means anything anymore. The theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehman, in his seminal book on Postdramatic Theatre sees a little hope in this stage, as the audience is required to connect some loose dots and maybe, if one is not too disillusioned find some new hooks to hang onto and continue life. By abandoning aesthetic form, mimesis loses its force. Only the dominant perception and worldview is affirmatively portrayed such that the audience cannot perceive any tension between reality and what is shown. Without any artistic tension, there is no story told, no aesthetic experience, no insights made – except the one that things are indeed getting a little dreary.

Instead of being a place in which one can retire and “roam freely in imagination” for a while in order to gather strength and insight, the field of art becomes just another field in which one is told that there’s nothing to be expected. The autobiographical attempts of artists trying to give meaning and value to their lives then freeze in the cold and ice of that field, and by obeying the rules of postmodern performance they take good care not to contradict the rules of postmodernism and postdramatic art. Thereby they kill the last attempt of understanding.

“The act of observing humans for the purpose of examining and understanding their behavior and their actions is considered to be an illusion and a habituated lie. With this stroke, dramatic situations lose all legitimacy as a form through which the world can be described or translated into narrative structures.”  
(Stegemann, 2009, 19)

Art walking is still very much creating new forms. At the same time, some of the creations are placed within existing aesthetic categories such as visual arts, or sculpture. Some of art walking is also ascribed to the performing arts. While certain works remain on the level of performance in a fragmented, postdramatic sense, breaking with the aesthetic form of dramatization of the material, some works are finding new ways, using postmodern features and building a strong dramaturgy at the same time.

On the other side, there are walking artists who seem to be walking away from this by going on very long hikes in very remote places. When they come back and hang their documentation into galleries they get in touch with the postmodern dominated art field. And maybe they remained in that field in the first place by trying to lift their action into art, by making their strenuous and individual walk art, by making an autobiographical, everyday thing that happens in a certain place and space art.

To transcend the immediacy of everyday reality, the container space of landscape, the physicality of human locomotion, the subjective simulation of situation, walking artists can play with the tension between the physical and the social space, between a dramatized reality, and a social and subjective reality. The audio-walk appears to be very rich possibilities of dramatization as so many dimensions and layers can be composed into the sound piece on the one hand, and complemented with the surrounding on the other hand.

Certain types of audio-walks, it appears, are finding a new aesthetic form which manages to build up the transcending strength while at the same time working with postmodern elements of performing art such as the use of reality (its site-specificity, the voices of real people not

characters, facts of the environment in which it takes place), the importance of the body and perception (through walking), the leaning on collage and montage, the participation of the audience (here the listener-perceiver-walker). Audio-walks enrobe these elements with their aesthetic form, they form a whole and take the walker (audience) onto a journey which needs to be followed quite strictly. Through the means of sound in headphones a level of concentration is reached that coproduces the strength of the form, built through the guiding voice(s) of the sound composition which has a double role of guiding the walker and of building a dramaturgy out of story and place. Place is an important element in audio-walks and an active contributor to the dramaturgy of the piece. If the place is cleverly built into the piece, the piece (its story and tensions) unfolds while walking through that place which becomes a social space, because it is the site in which the negotiation of the guiding tensions happen. The place is not simply a room anymore so that characters have a receptacle or some historic placement. Place in audio-walks alludes directly to the social space in which the characters involved move. It is in the social space that they negotiate the big tensions of the piece, the struggles over power. Using place in that way is an important element of the aesthetic form of audio-walks. To achieve the state of aesthetic form, it seems, audio-walks need to enrobe the real elements with the veil of the aesthetic form. The notion of creative non-fiction, borrowed from literature, partly captures this new combination of aesthetic documentary. But it is not to be mistaken for a beautified documentary. Much work can be done here in experimenting with making audio-walks and working towards a new aesthetic form!

## The Audio-Walks of Janet Cardiff

I took my first audiowalk in Berlin. It was really a videowalk. I was working at the Hebbel am Ufer theatre when Janet Cardiff staged *Ghost Machine*, a video walk through the old Hebbel Theater. I was given a video camera at the box office and told to watch and listen to the video on the

LCD screen flipped open, and to simply be guided by it. I was hooked. The work that the artist had created offered a multi-layered journey involving the mind, the senses, memories, imaginations, architecture, history and space. Following her voice, her story, walking, engaging my own story, knowledge, perception, constantly organizing my senses to discover, interpret, question, pause, advance. The human being challenged at its best.

Janet Cardiff's audio-walks use some postmodern features but strongly rein them in through aesthetic form: they stand out for their high degree of dramatization and fictionalization, allowing for plenty of postmodern co-creation while still guiding the sublimation along her dramaturgy to points of release. The Canadian artist makes audio-walks that combine fiction and documentary, sensory experience with intellectual stimulation, her audio-walks give the listener-walker the opportunity "to roam freely in imagination" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100). The walker-listener following a audio-walk by Cardiff constantly has to believe in agency, constantly has to mediate between reality and mimesis in the dramatized form of the audio-walk. This is an aestheticized form of art walking that has high critical potential.

Janet Cardiff, often collaborating with George Bures Miller, is one of the pioneering audio-walking artists who interlaces autobiographical and narrator's voice, fiction and other characters, as well as the factual ("be careful of the steep stairs here") without fully revealing what is fact and what is fiction. Cardiff's work relies heavily on the sound that guides the listener-walker through space, and she uses a very intricate technique called binaural audio recording. Sounds are recorded through several microphones, so that, for instance, a sound from the left really is heard only in the left ear of the sound-walker, what we know as stereo sound is augmented by sounds from behind, in front, above, below... This way, space and one's orientation in space gains importance in the walking experience. Cardiff also adds sounds that are distinctively historic, recognizable in their era, layering times and spaces into the walker's ear who is co-creating this dense fabric of story, place and path:

“The space traversed is continually overwritten with the perpetual passage of time, to which new emotions, affects, and thoughts are attached; they direct our attention and what we actually see in situ as if by an invisible hand. [...] While she poaches, steals, and hijacks [the place’s] sounds, she simultaneously listens to what is going on within herself and notes the responses provoked by the site. She uses the varied, stormy landscape of her own imaginations to create surprising, but nonetheless convincing, associative connections between history, the recent past, and the fantastical.” (Schaub, 2005, 102)

Cardiff and Bures Miller create a dramaturgy and set up which creates a high physical, sensorial and mental alertness of the audio-walker who can “roam freely in imagination” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, 100). This space of imagination is created by the gap between fact and fiction, between the bodily reality of the audience walking in (probably) unknown places following a voice and the densely layered semi-fictitious dramaturgy of Cardiff’s audio-walks. The physical aspect of walking, the orientation in the environment, together with her instructions such as “now continue”, “I have some photographs for you”, “try to walk to the sound of my footsteps so we can stay together” regularly pull the audience-walker back into the reality of walking.



“I have some photographs for you”: Image showing a walker-listener take an audio-walk by Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*, in Central Park in 2004, holding a photograph that is given to the audience when they set out. The photograph was taken at this exact spot, thereby layering times and stories.  
© Janet Cardiff, 2004 [Fair Use]  
From: [cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/longhair.html#](http://cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/longhair.html#)

Sometimes the surrounding soundscape comes from the recording, sometimes from the environment, it is not always clear, the layers interlace. One is walking through a mixture of the reality as one knows it, and the new layers of realities that Cardiff narrates or confronts the audio-walker with. One’s attention has to constantly switch between realities, an entertaining and insightful exercise that allows one to see between the cracks in the realities, see new ones, see their social construction, see nothing, see, listen, walk and roam in imagination.

## The Dialectic in Audio-Walks

In awareness of the postmodern challenges, using walking as artistic practice might reveal new paths. Reading Adorno's suggestions for an immanent critique, and ultimately for a dialectical critique, opens up a door to interpreting walking as art and its artistic and socio-political potential. "[T]he goal of immanent criticism, achieved through careful analysis of the meaning and structure of the object, is to reveal the contradiction between the objective idea offered by the work and its pretension." (Bernstein, 1991,19) But Adorno is quick to acknowledge that immanent critique alone would be a isolated work of the mind alone. Any critique needs to be aware of the totality of society, that is to say, of the fact that everything – even postmodern or subversively-intended art – is drenched in society, its inner logic and contradictions. A 'dialectical critique' is both needed and quasi impossible.

The position of dialectical criticism is a non-position; it can neither immerse itself in the object in the manner of idealizing, redemptive criticism, nor take a stand outside culture by comparing it with a fictitious absolute<sup>57</sup>. To take up the former stance would amount to acceding to the cult of the mind; while to take up the latter stance would be to reveal hatred of it. 'The dialectical critic of culture must both participate in culture and not participate. Only then does he do justice to his object and to himself.' (Bernstein, 1991, pp. 19-20; the last sentence Bernstein quotes from Adorno, 1967, 33 )

Let's interpret this ideal as embodied in art walking and see how it is built up. In order to analyze and position art walking, Adorno's Kulturkritik (cultural critique, critique of culture or society) can be understood as optionally being art criticism or art with a certain critical dimension as both have the potential to offer a cultural critique, understanding or new imaginations. Art walking with its real life relation through the very physical fact of walking in the environment brings a phenomenological and documentary dimension to this art form. But its fictitious and staged

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<sup>57</sup> That is what conservative critique does in a nostalgia for high art. Adorno is often mistakenly put together in the same box with conservative critics by his quick opponents who do not understand that his suggestions go beyond the high art / low art divide.

qualities bring artistic dimensions to walking that open up spaces for interpretation and imagination for the artist and for the 'audience'<sup>58</sup>. Together they form a Brechtian distancing effect, oscillating between fiction and first-person narration.

Literature and art projects on walking like to marvel in the revolutionary potential of walking. The further alienated a culture is becoming from this basic form of locomotion, the more revolutionary potential is ascribed to it, it appears. At the same time, as argued elsewhere in this dissertation, physical capacity and control over the (social) body in (social) space is indeed an important feature of autonomy. Therefore, it is key to understand and master that social body and space in its specific historical and spatial context. Michel DeCerteau's short chapter on Walking the City in the first volume of his *The Practice of Everyday Life* (DeCerteau 1984) is an important reference for many walking artists and scholars. DeCerteau contrasts two views regarding walking: the strategic view on walking by the dominant powers and classes, the tactical view while walking by the oppressed, which is almost everyone. Many walking practices focus on strengthening the tactics and thereby remain in the dimension of the tactical, the oppressed, the victim with a vengeance. Emancipation and revolution require overcoming the tactical stage. Adopting aesthetic form is a way to overcome the victimized position of the tactical player. Art walking can renew the instrument of aesthetic form by creating the walking aesthetic form. Let's read Brecht again:

"I observe that I am beginning to become a classic. Those extreme forced efforts [of expressionism] to spew forth with all means certain (banal or soon to be banal) content! One blames the classics for their service to form and overlooks that it is the form which is the servant here." (Brecht, 1975, 138 quoted and translated by Marcuse, 1978, 43)

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<sup>58</sup> Maybe 'audience' is not the right notion here, as it is not (only) about listening in walking our, 'spectators' is not capturing the complexity of art walking either. 'Participants' might be a notion to test. For the moment we can overcome this issue by speaking about the 'reception' of art walking. For a discussion of the audience see for instance *The spectator and the spectacle: Audiences in modernity and postmodernity* (Kennedy 2009).

At this point in the history of theatre and the performing arts, the audio-walk as a site-specific performance-walk, is the fruit of several historic developments within the performing arts. Brecht brought the epic theatre to counteract against the predominant manipulative character of Aristotelian drama at his time. The catharsis of the Aristotelian drama had been and continues to be criticized for its manipulative mechanism – and indeed, much of this is happening in Hollywood’s movies that follow an Aristotelian dramaturgical structure to tell the stories of heroes and heroines (Hiltunen 2001). They make the audience cry or fear or yearn despite every attempt to stay realistic. They have their audience regress into immaturity. The audience leaves the cinema (and also the musical or theatre venue) with unfulfilled feeling, emotions were shaken, tears shed, laughter sounded at the right time, values were confirmed. But one’s own creativity, one’s own thoughts were interrupted, kept at bay so that the authoritarian and mainstream interpretation of the piece is secured. Against this, postdramatic theatre repeats the non sense and hopelessness of an age allegedly devoid of big narratives. Again, we can ask Benjamin what kind of audience corresponds to the art form. Sad people for the German Trauerspiel, immature<sup>59</sup> people for Blockbusters, fragmented and a-historic mindsets for postdramatic works?

But we should refrain from classifying the postmodern audience as immature, depressed, or hopelessly logically and emotionally fragmented per se. Performing arts audiences are diverse and curious. Lately, more and more voices have arisen who criticize the ever same conceptual art and the fragmented viewpoint of postdramatic performance. Is it time to come up with new drama, new epic theatre, new stories and a new worldview for a new logos of art?

Aesthetic forms and their reinterpretation have always been marked by the context in which they have been performed, be it the reinterpretation of antique plays, modern plays or operas, or be it

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<sup>59</sup> Immature is used for lack of a better word, it sounds too depreciative in the notion of ‘immature audiences’, the reference here is Adorno’s repeated call for ‘mündige Menschen’, mature grown-ups, able to make decisions. The culture industry in capitalism creates immaturity in its entertainment structures, since it is about entertaining and not about inspiring.

the creation of new work in the performing arts. The audio-walk comes at a time in which styles have been mixed and matched for some decades, there is nothing the audience has not seen or which could astonish them, the contemporary audience is somewhat apathetic<sup>60</sup>. That in itself co-creates the postmodern yearning, at least for the art-goers, in that the aesthetic spark just does not happen as often anymore. The hidden spaces of imagination here and there in a piece are covered up, filled with signs stating what you wish they were.

The audio-walk, in turn, takes the 'mündige Mensch' by the hand and offers to join it for a walk, to listen and to hear at the same time, to see and to perceive, to think and to sense, to walk through geographical and social spaces and spaces of the audio-walker's imagination. It has a wide spectrum of performing art styles in its toolbox that can be layered and composed into a piece. The aesthetic form is the audio-walk, the elements it is made of can vary. As in Brechtian epic theatre, there is a main thread, a narration, a story. But there is also the social context that is brought into the audio-walker's attention. S/he is constantly oscillating between the many layers of narration, perception, and thought that are going on simultaneously both from the composed piece and from the walker partaking in the audio-walk. To a certain extent, the audio-walk, and any soundwalk in general, is a form of augmented reality, but one which allows the walker to participate in this augmentation through activation his/her interpretation. The audio-walk might be closest to the aesthetic form of the essay (T. W. Adorno 1984). And that is the key to the audio-walk's critical potential.

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<sup>60</sup> Or anaestheticized, to use Neill Leach's notion for architecture.

# Aesthetic Education with Audio-Walks

In this spirit of aesthetic education and experimenting with building a new aesthetic form I have undertaken two semester-long audio-walk projects with students, one at Virginia Tech in 2011, and one at the University of Michigan in 2012.

## 1. Blacksburg Walks

I directed the documentary audio-walk project 'Blacksburg Walks' in the School of Public and International Affairs in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech in 2011. In a special study class, students were introduced to human geography and documentary art in a studio-inspired class that studied the ecologies of food in and around Blacksburg with the goal of producing audio-walks on that topic. The academic vision was to involve students into a creative process of intellectual and aesthetic creation. The vision of outreach was to produce audio-walks which would be accessible for the entire academic and non-university community as an invitation to explore this place on foot, to make Blacksburg walk.

### Geography Meets Aesthetic Education

The class discovered the multiple layers of history, culture and politics in the Appalachian landscape and in the social practices of university and community members, this process is

called 'deep mapping' (Pearson and Shanks 2001; Biggs 2010). Offering, in a first step, a theoretical framework allowing for the critical study of food production and consumption and sustainability discourses, the class, in a second step, learnt basic documentary research skills like interviewing, story telling and building a narrative, as well as composing sound. Through field trips and individual walks as well as many aesthetic exercises, walking and sensory perception were highlighted in this class' sensory approach to aesthetic education, since the project's outcome was to produce audio-walks through Blacksburg exploring the social relations of the local food and environment, and motivating an audience to experience the cultural dimension of walking in this context.



*Blacksburg Walks* class, taking a campus field trip, guided by a student (left) who worked on an audio-walk called *Edible Campus*  
Photograph by author, 2011

The third pedagogical moment was to learn how to join the theoretical framework and the research material into an aesthetic creation in the form of a sound composition for a guided audio-walk. Next to dramaturgy, considerable software skills had to be managed by the students in order to produce the sound compositions. Throughout the semester, students kept an online logbook to experiment with ideas, log their research, and steadily build their walk portfolio. The class was held in intense workshops in Blacksburg, and online, experimenting with online teaching and collaboration options, which all contributed to this unique kind of online and real mapping of food and food ecologies.

## Audio-Walks on the Ecologies of Food

Four different audio-walks were produced by the students of this class:

- one with a general focus on sustainability in Blacksburg,
- one on wild edibles on the Virginia Tech campus,
- one on the relations between the phenomenon of instant gratification and 24/7 consumption,
- and one on the dynamics between personal and collective processes of defining choices in regards to the consumption and production of goods.

The audiowalks are between 30 and 60 minutes long. They are held in a documentary style. It was not the plan to create artistic audio-walks as discussed in this dissertation – audio-walks as aesthetic form capable of sublimation and transcendence of pressing problems. Rather, these audiowalks were strictly documentary, composed of the narrating, guiding voice of the student and complemented by voices of their interviewees as well as distinct environmental sounds and soundscapes. Nevertheless, the creative process of making the audio-walks and of

taking the audio-walks, is an aesthetic experience capable of inspiring beyond the informational level. Clearly, sublimating ideas and problems into a given form, the audio-walk, was a challenge of which they learnt a lot. Inherently, the audio-walk calls upon the intellectual as well as the aesthetic, sensory and perceptive capacities of the maker and the walker and thereby aspires to reach further dimensions of perceptive and intellectual synthesis. The process of writing and recording the narration, for example, involved several stages of research and analysis, then of writing and revising, and finally, most interestingly, the recording of the narration became almost a finding of their own voice – their artist’s and researcher’s voice. Moving away from established melodies and dictions, the students worked relentlessly to let go of the news-presenter’s speech to gradually find their rhythm, tone, and melody. Thereby they concluded the creative process of research and analysis, of construction and deconstruction and reconstruction, of writing and rewriting,..., with finding their words, their voices which now lead every single audio-walk. From the student’s feedback I also understood that this work was an important step in their learning to manage individual, self-reliant work, in learning to interact with community members, officials and handle the necessary administration of this, and, finally, in experimenting with sensory methods and theoretical frameworks at the same time, in contextualizing, and in learning how to condense a complex idea into a definite form.



Panorama taken at the corner of Draper/Roanoke Street in Blacksburg, VA, illustrating the tension between the consumer politics of Farmers Markets and 7/11 fast food shops discussed in this student’s audio-walk.  
© Charlotte Maitland, 2011 [Fair Use]  
From: [www.blacksburgwalks.spia.vt.edu](http://www.blacksburgwalks.spia.vt.edu)

## Soundscapes of Childhood

In the Fall of 2012, I was invited to direct a semester-long workshop within an English Literature class at the University of Michigan's Residential College as an experiment of interdisciplinary and aesthetic education. In 'Reading and Writing Landscapes of Childhood: Growing Up Near the Great Lakes', a course taught by Elizabeth Goodenough, I worked with students on a walking, reading and writing workshop leading to the production of individual soundwalks or soundscapes. Some were more sound-based, some were more strongly narrator-based. We called the Soundscapes of Childhood as the landscape and the sounds of the Great Lakes Region was our primary source of inspiration, the stories we read took place in that region at various times in history, and the autobiographical, autotopographical walking and writing was also rooted in this landscape. Together these elements formed a soundscape, a composition of sounds of the landscape, the environment, but also of biography, story and reflection – soundscapes of childhood.

### Literature meets Geography meets Aesthetic Education

Close readings of children's literature by authors from the Great Lakes region provided the foundation for exploring the question of how tales of home and play shape our understanding of nature, society and our personal landscapes.

I led the students to discover layers of history, story and culture in the landscape of the Arboretum in an autotopographical approach that combined literature, geography and autobiographical writing of the Great Lakes. The students were all natives of the Great Lakes region, except for one, and gradually, walking, listening, recording, and writing, the students

interlaced literary and historic ecology with their own biographies, weaving a dense fabric of environmental sounds and their own voices.

We chose the University of Michigan's Nichols Arboretum as our playground for its ambiguous character of being both sustained Great Lakes nature and cultural or cultured landscape. We took field-trips together, and the students also went on individual research walks to observe and to record sound and voice for their soundscapes. While the Arboretum provided our connection to notions of nature and a wonderful opportunity to be outside so close to campus, some students also played with the transition to the urban built environment and the differences between the acoustic contexts.

The creative process of making these soundwalks engaged students in various disciplines and design stages. Field trips in which we practiced a theoretical constructivist framework together with notions of theatrical or film composition helped them carefully choose and understand sounds to record and then compose their work in specific software. Students learned documentary essentials ranging from formulating a research question to the techniques and ethics of recording to storytelling and dramaturgy. Group field-trips and individual walks, lectures, readings, meeting authors Great Lakes children's literature we read, individual work and studio feedback sessions led to the creation of these six short Soundscapes of Childhood.



Walking and Writing in the University of Michigan Nichols Arboretum in Ann Arbor, MI where we practiced walking as research for *Soundscapes of Childhood*.  
Photograph by author, 2012.

The students created various types of audio-walks, but they all share a poetic, more abstract dimension rather than a documentary one. The interlacing of the personal and the cultural was a topic during the creative process and it very much gave shape to the soundwalks as well. I hope it also invites walkers to be inspired to think on foot about their own landscapes of childhood – and adulthood. The walks are between 5 and 10 minutes long, allowing time for a visitor to take several walks at the Arboretum.

## Healing Walks

The audio-walks are accessible online, this is what we chose to make them accessible to a large community. We were thrilled, however, that the University of Michigan Hatcher Graduate Library

approached us with the idea of turning Soundscapes of Childhood into an exhibit. In the Fall semester of 2013, the project was exhibited in a combination of sound domes under which the gallery guest could listen to loops of the soundscapes, and exhibit boards presenting the students and their idea as well as the two instructors and their conceptions (see image).



*Soundscapes of Childhood* exhibit at the University of Michigan Hatcher Graduate Library, visitor listening under sound-dome and reading about student-artist's autotopography  
Photograph courtesy of Jamie Vander Brook, 2013  
From: [sites.lsa.umich.edu/soundscapes/exhibition/](http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/soundscapes/exhibition/)

During the course of the exhibit, through the Manager for Patient Family Centered Care of the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital (located next to the Nichols Arboretum) approached us with the wish to integrate the Soundscapes of Childhood soundwalks into their program for children and families who have extended stays at the hospital. This collaboration led to a partnering between the hospital, us, and the Arboretum. A little walk-along brochure, a mini

exhibit as well as a program on the hospital networks Get Well Channel now features the Soundscapes. I sincerely hope that they invite families to go for a walk in the nearby Arboretum, and listen to the walks, or not. If we've managed to open a door to the (underused) park and the soothing qualities of nature, I am satisfied. If the student's soundscapes can offer a hand to hold and take a walk with, I am happy. If they can even invite others to roam freely in imagination, all the better.



Irina's soundscape deals with her childhood spent travelling between Chicago and Bucharest. These tracks lead to Chicago – and run through the Ann Arbor Arboretum where we walked.

Photo by author, 2013

From: [sites.lsa.umich.edu/soundscapes/exhibition](http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/soundscapes/exhibition)

## Postmodernity Devours Its Offspring?

In analyzing art walking as a postmodern phenomenon, I encounter the very difficulty or even contradiction of the postmodern concept: are the observed elements that are bundled under the notion of postmodernism inherently modern or indeed postmodern? Without entering into the depths of this philosophical (or even political) problem<sup>61</sup>, a few thoughts about the modernism/postmodernism conundrum are helpful to understand today's growing interest in walking in the intellectual and the artistic fields (and to some extent the general public's interest in the case of walkable urbanism and its spectacle, topic discussed in this dissertation's Part I). But it is helpful to analyze walking as art in its postmodern context as it bears both the traps and the potential of postmodernity.

In critical theory's framework, to understand modern Western society, alienation and cultural domination play a crucial role in explaining the continuity of the capitalist mode of production and rule. Today, alienation might come from a mixture of allegedly creative jobs in the creative economy, and I mentioned the suave repression through the expanding culture industry. Postmodern scientists and artists turned to everyday phenomena with an interest to break this domination and to reclaim life and thought from the bottom up – or from the everyday up. Walking as art, walking as research method, and to a certain extent also walkable urbanism can all be understood as an attempt to reclaim an everyday practice – walking – from a car-centered culture and built environment. It is striking, however, that the predominant forms that come forth in this endeavor are not everyday forms of walking but performative forms of walking, art walking, research walking, and promenading in walkable spaces that are spaces of spectacle. The alienation from walking, from a direct use of the body for locomotion, is so advanced that all the postmodern reclaims of walking bring forth these performative forms of walking. An

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<sup>61</sup> For discussions of this issue see for instance the debate between Habermas and Giddens (Habermas 1981; Giddens 1981) or Jameson's Logic of Late Capitalism (Jameson 1984).

everyday activity is elevated to something extraordinary. It is aestheticized. Thereby, walking (or the relationship to walking and the use of the body) goes through another stage of alienation through creating even more spectacle. It reproduces late capitalism's logic and cannot unwind the postmodern spiral. It cannot fulfill the yearning still attached to the modern promise of happiness, it only aggrandizes the yearning by creating images of idealized walking and the silent realization of failure to live up to this image without understanding the reasons for this failure. Adorno described the non-awareness within the culture industry like this:

In so far as the culture industry arouses a feeling of well-being that the world is precisely in that order suggested by the culture industry, the substitute gratification which it prepares for human beings cheats them out of the same happiness which it deceitfully projects. (Adorno, 1991, 106)

In reference to the culture industry in the context of postmodernism some decades later, Bernstein writes:

The culture industry's response is the production of works, typified in the new architecture, that, through a mimesis of aestheticization, indict the spectator for failing to find gratification where there is none. (Bernstein, 1991, 25)

We've gone from soft domination through culture to a heightened sense of individual agency in which simulacra (Baudrillard 1994) and pastiche<sup>62</sup> create the deceitful gratification critical theory speaks of. Walking's subversive potential is appropriated. In walkable urbanism it has happened to a large extent. In art walking it can happen too. Postmodernism devours its offspring.

By calling walking (simply) an everyday activity I do not deny walking its political character. On the contrary, the everyday is political, and walking, the moving body in space, is highly political, exactly through its social character: the details of walking (who, where, how, when, why...) are

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<sup>62</sup> „The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche. This concept, which we owe to Thomas Mann (in *Doktor Faustus*), who owed it in turn to Adorno's great work on the two paths of advanced musical experimentation (Schoenberg's innovative plannification, Stravinsky's irrational eclecticism), is to be sharply distinguished from the more readily received idea of parody.“ (Jameson, 1984, 64)

subject to change, social change. Throughout this study, walking is considered a social practice, socially charged with meaning and a distinctive function. Bodily techniques, geographical knowledge, street smartness, dress and interactive capacities all contribute to the specific form of walking in a given time and place of a given person. And these forms change, several forms coexist in one society. Socio-anthropologically speaking: walking is a social practice (Bourdieu 1994; Boltanski 1971; Mauss 1936). Walking is performative in the sense of re-/producing social reality and social order. It is of key sociological importance that something as trivial and everyday as walking is conceptually understood as a social practice. I would even dare to say it is a *fait social total*, a social fact from which we can read an astonishingly high amount of cultural and social information about a given society (Mauss 1950). With all the social tasks that walking fulfills to contribute to someone's standing and to an entire community's or even society's order of things, people and institutions, as well as to the order of movement in space, walking as social practice is a central anthropological and sociological concept. It helps us understand the built environment and the social action taking place inside of and with it.

Postmodern attempts to refocus on walking come out of a set of postmodern contexts: be it out of frustration with a car-based society and landscape, be it out of a yearning for human-scale and human-speed mobility, be it out of a yearning to reclaim the body's capacities in a technologically assisted world, be it out of any other postmodern reason for refocusing on the subjective and the everyday. The focus on walking that is evident in phenomena and trends spanning from urban design to leisure choices to art and research carries the imprints of these postmodern yearnings. In the previous chapters of this dissertation I concluded that the gross tendency of the reclaiming of walking in the framework of urban design, architecture and urban walking skills is deeply enrooted in the postmodern loop or the logic of late capitalism. This happens for a set of reasons, led on by the force of the image, social imaginary and the spectacular in the maelstrom of late capitalism's alienation and domination through the channels of culture. It also happens through the aesthetisation of society, art, and science which create a pseudo-individuality, style or life-style, instead of what Adorno called the 'non-identical'.

Thereby, the political force is taken out of the movement towards more walking (be it in urban design or in art), more physical capacity, imaginary freedom and ultimately happiness, as there is a qualitative and political difference between...

...“pseudo-individuality and individuality, pleasure and happiness, consensus and freedom, pseudo-activity and activity, illusory otherness and non-identical otherness” (Bernstein, 1991, 26).

Michel Foucault has problematized various ways in which power is distributed within society and, like water, finds its ways to spread into every corner in order to maintain – even if in new forms – the dominant reign (Foucault 1980). In the political matter of walking, power also spreads like water in recuperating attempts of increasing physical capacities and geographic freedom of movement.

In art walking many of these dangers are lurking as well. But here, the performativity of walking can be aestheticized consciously for aesthetic sublimation as well as in a way that it becomes an aesthetic form. There is big potential to overcome at least some of the postmodern challenges in art walking through the very character of art that allows the audience to perceive and to think about the mirrored society experienced in the performance. This very potential of art walking as performing art is what this chapter explored and underlined. Audiowalking represents great potential to be more than a retreat into an everyday activity that gives back a little physical capacity, a little movement in social and geographical space. It is a new aesthetic form, combining existing forms such as drama and site-specific performance with walking and documentary, together coming close to the aesthetic form of the essay, that allows the walker to dive into speculative theorization, story, insight and imagination (T. W. Adorno 1984). Audiowalking, through its aesthetic dimension, offers a fertile ground for a new aesthetic form which, in a forward motion, combines both traditional dramatic tension with postmodern artistic elements, thereby reflecting society, reaching its members, and, hopefully, negotiating some of our pressing problems.

# Conclusion

1. The aim of this dissertation has been to construct a theoretical framework for analyzing the socio-economic and cultural context which brought forth aestheticized forms of walking. While more such forms might exist, I focused on walking in walkable urban design and on walking as art.
2. My focus on these was motivated by the practice-led research that preceded and led into this dissertation: the creation of audio-walks and the anthropological exploration of walking as a social and cultural practice. The personal experience of having difficulties walking in the built American environment brought me to discover the phenomenon of walkable urbanism which is urban design that focuses on creating walkable spaces. In parallel, creating audio-walks with students drew me into investigating walking as a form of art. Through my study, methodologically based in critical theory, I was able to discover a societal relation between the two fields and forms of walking.
3. That relation is deeply anchored in modernity and in capitalism and has evolved over decades and centuries; since the principles of enlightenment have found a form and new myths (or principles) have been created such as progress, efficiency, and the pursuit of happiness (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). I describe that overarching relation between walking in walkable urban design and walking in art as the dialectic of aestheticization and commodification of society. Reading walking today through that lens allowed me to understand its socio-economic genealogy.
4. The process of commodification describes capitalism's survival strategy of integrating more and more spheres of society and life into the logic of capitalism according to which capital needs to accumulate surplus value. Goods and services are invented as or turned into commodities by involving paid labor to produce and to buy them. New

markets are networks generating and trading such commodities. I argued that in capital's recent reorientation towards the city, walkable urbanism is such a new market in that it brings with it a walkable life-style that needs all sorts of new commodities to feed it.

5. Today, in advanced late capitalism, new markets are hard to create since almost everything is already commodified but some pre-capitalist rests of human interaction and private life. In analyzing the context of walkable urbanism I studied socio-spatial consequences of capitalism and found two major phenomena closely connected to each other: one represents a next step of the restless urban landscape which draws capital back to the city in reaction to people's disappointment with suburbia and in seeing potential in revitalizing cities as new markets. In this sense, I problematized walkable urbanism as a spatial form of capitalism in general and as the 'walkability fix' in particular. Leaning on David Harvey, the walkability fix is a specific spatial fix, a temporary fix for capital's quest for new markets (David Harvey 2001), a fix that has spatial and social consequences, as buildings get built, others are abandoned, and the social relations between people change in reaction to the spatial changes and the further commodification.
6. In relation to the walkability fix, I see walkable urbanism as a generator of new markets: a new market on its own and, because walkable urbanism is tightly weaving into the imaginaries of creative cities and economies, it complements those markets too. The other is the commodification of urban forms of cohabitation and life with the help of technology: Lines in coffee shops can be skipped with an app, lines at airport security can be skipped for a fee, one's car can instantly become a cab, one's bed a hotel bed. The life-style of living in a walkable neighborhood is so sought after that a walkability premium is paid by whomever can afford it (Pivo and Fisher 2011) but then rarely lived the way the imaginaries of walkability convey (Qiu 2013). Life-style is bought but not lived. While earlier aesthetic subjects would still have to actually contribute to their

aesthetic air, the postmodern aesthetic subject can do with simply alluding to a life-style with money and a game of pastiche (Jameson 1998). It is in this process that urban skills get lost, civic interaction and action become vain, and that the images and the imaginaries of walkable urbanism form a space of spectacle in which people are loosely connected personally but tightly connected socio-economically: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.” (Debord [1967] 2004, 7) The social relation is that of wage labor and social hierarchies based on that, the images are mediating in the sense of hiding that truth through glittering images of the culture industry or images that convey imaginaries of the New American Dream, in this case walkable urbanism (Leinberger 2009). They are also mediating in a less hidden way, as aestheticization and commodification are so interlaced, the spectacle more and more makes no secret out of commodification. From buying a house in a walkable neighborhood – “Walking isn’t just good for you. It has become an indicator of your socioeconomic status”... (Leinberger 2012) – to buying a coffee – “Skip the line next time.” (Starbucks app campaign 2015) – social distinction through a bought life-style that comes without social responsibilities is at the core of society in postmodernity.

7. The process of aestheticization, in turn, is the modern subject’s constant struggle against the dominant modern organization and bureaucratization of life. Rooted in artistic movements it has sprawled out into other fields of society and aestheticized them with its desires, ideas and styles. Aesthetics refers to the senses (aisthesis) as well as to the arts, it is a process of struggle against the rationalization of modernity. Originally, the core of the process of aestheticization is critical, rebellious. But through the various stages of modernity the stages and forms of aestheticization have become more and more entangled with capitalism and its commodifying force. The sociologist Andreas Reckwitz sees a three-step development from early modernity to organized modernity to postmodernity each bringing forth a specific aesthetic subject. First the

romantic subject seeking an alternative to the bureaucratization of society and personal life, then the aesthetic subject of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which sought excess in the urban fabric between dada and the Folies Bergère, next, the counter culture movement bringing forth new aesthetic subjects and ideals in seeking playful social transgressions as well as disconnecting signifier and signified (Reckwitz 2012b). This postmodern wave of aestheticization is probably the strongest in that it flows into every aspect of society; this happens not least because today aestheticization is closely intertwined with the forces of capitalism which seek to commodify what is not yet commodified. The domain of the aesthetic is now either vulgarized into a life-style or co-opted by the culture industry, or both – and dissolving signs from their meaning has not helped making it any better, on the contrary, an intellectual vacuum now meets an ever stronger logic of capitalism, the intellect and the senses mask their defeat through life-style:

Life-styles, the culture industry's recycling of style in art, represent the transformation of an aesthetic category, which once possessed a moment of negativity, into a quality of commodity consumption. The expansion of the role of competing life-styles, the permeation of these styles into the home, the pervasiveness of music, the way in which products have become a direct extension of their advertising image, all these phenomena taken a closing of the gap between the culture industry and everyday life itself, and a consequent aestheticization of social reality. (Bernstein, 1991, 23)

8. The most evident traces of commodified aestheticization can be found in phenomena such as the trend for creativity and the return to pseudo-individual production after decades of mass consumption, the continuous development of the society of the spectacle (Debord [1967] 2004) through the excessive development of the visual over other senses together with an explosion of imagery through the digitalization of media, the importance of life-styles in connection with social distinction and conspicuous consumption that concerns not only commodities to buy but also actually becoming more and more commodified through the disciplining of the body into an aesthetically

charged life-style. Indeed, I suggest, the life-style of walkable urbanism, even just for visitors of walkable spaces, creates a 'walkable body'. This is a commodity-body in that it carries brands and styles and can only through this act participate in this life-style and feel connected to an imaginary through images. Walter Benjamin wrote that the sandwich-man was the last incarnation of the flâneur, the walkable body in walkable urbanism might be another version of the sandwich-wo/man / flâneur. The walkable body is not walking, it is walkable.

9. In postmodernity, in late capitalism, that is today, aestheticization and commodification are so tightly interlaced, that the sense of rebellion is almost lost. Aestheticization has been appropriated by the culture industry and is thereby serving capitalism's suave repression. Walking is a case in point. Walking is a more aesthetic, sensory way of moving through space. Walking and a landscape and built environment that allows for more walking was a desire of the aesthetic subject, an alternative to the car-centered spatial form of capital, an alternative to the technologically assisted body of modernity. But this desire and possible answers have been appropriated by capitalism's mechanism of creating new markets and of keeping rebellions at bay. In this situation of struggle aestheticization is increasing as commodification is reaching deeper layers of society. Walking becomes an aestheticized form in a new setting called walkable urbanism.
10. Further, aestheticization itself has become so deeply commodified a process, that we can speak of an aestheticized capitalism – reflected in current terms such as 'creative economy', 'creative cities', and 'culture industries', but also in terms not immediately associated with the economy such as 'arts-integrated research', 'critical and creative thinking', 'design thinking' or walkable urbanism's slogan 'live, work, play'.
11. I traced the dispersion of the process of aestheticization into spheres of society to academia, architecture, urban design and planning, in order to understand the cultural

context which brought forth the aestheticized forms of walking that I encountered in the spaces that were specifically made for walking (walkable urbanism). I found a strong development of visual culture starting in the 1960s and 1970s which considerably contributed to the broadening of the society of spectacle already underway, and which also brought with it academic and artistic trends that put the visual at the forefront in a mixture of a critique of the image-laden media society and of a fascination with the image and the visual. This was the beginning of the third and strongest wave of societal aestheticization. Today, with digital media and creative technologies being so accessible, the aestheticization through images and decorative design has become an imperative without content but with a receptacle: the creative economy in the creative cities.

12. Creative cities often have 'walkable' arts districts. Even small town main street revitalization projects are planned as arts-led development (Markusen and Gadwa 2010; Markusen and Schrock 2006). There is a relation between the desire to walk and the desire to be involved in aesthetic practices, even only by looking at art. It has its roots in the aesthetic struggle against the principles of modernity and capitalism. But in arts-led development and revitalization it is to a large extent already co-opted by capital and the culture industry that has cultural policy recommendations for integrating the arts into the creative economy.
13. The culture industry is not the only producer of so called art. There is a giant field of more or less "independent" creators in all possible genres and crossovers. In my search of the critical (not to say revolutionary!) potential of walking, and in continuation of my work with audio-walks, I set out to study another aestheticized form of walking: walking as art. Indeed, walking as art form has only come up in the 1960s with visual artists and dancers experimenting with the everyday rather than with drama, with new spatial orders and with the roots and basics of performance: a step, and another step, walking. Seen from these characteristics, walking as art is a typically postmodern phenomenon.

And so I use the study of postmodern performing arts as the starting ground for my inquiry into walking as art, as I consider walking as a performing art.

14. I complemented the theoretical framework of critical theory with theatre and performance studies of postmodern tendencies. In theatre and performance, as well, there is a process of aestheticization happening. The image and the sensory apparatus are receiving more attention. Similar postmodern tendencies as those happening in linguistics and the social sciences are also reflected in the performing arts: a return to the everyday and the epic, the move away from drama and a shared logos of values and references (post-dramatic theatre), the deconstruction of text, the disconnection of sign and meaning (Fischer-Lichte 2004; Lehmann 2005). The early performances of Aktionskunst and other site-specific or otherwise different happenings of the 1960 and 70s set the tone, the bourgeois illusory theatre is deconstructed with blood, sweat and audience interaction. But with the advent of video and theatre's fascination with that medium, the sensory and haptic quality is smothered by the overpowering force of the moving image. New illusions of the spectacle are moving into theatre and performance arts instead. In this setting, many allegedly critical productions become affirmative art, self-referential pastiche, in that they simply marvel in reproducing the complexity and the spectacle of postmodernity without offering space for imagination, for critique, for oscillating between fiction and reality because any attempt to oscillate and to seek sense is immediately deconstructed again and declared obsolete bourgeois thinking (Stegemann 2008).
15. In this difficult setting of art in postmodernity, art in the society of spectacle, I wonder to what extent art walking is simply a response to the focus on the everyday, the spatial turn, the autobiographical trend, the aestheticization process, and to what extent, in turn, it might be a source for new aesthetic forms that are able to transgress the postmodern limitations of depoliticized self-referentiality.

16. In the audio-walk I find potential for a new aesthetic form which works and plays with elements of postmodernism and at the same time develops a way out of this cul-de-sac. It is the combination of fiction with reality in the sound composition as well as its confrontation with fiction and reality in the spaces we walk through that audio-walks might be able to re-introduce a inherently aesthetic quality of going back and forth between fiction and reality or one's own reality to gain insights, visions, ideas. To take pleasure in spending time with art, not primarily to be entertained and distracted, but to be offered inspiration and space to contemplate. It is through the combined effort of the walking body and the active mind while walking to a well crafted piece that this oscillation can be fruitful.
17. So, I studied the socio-spatial consequences of modernity and capitalism by the example of walking in relation to spatial forms of capitalism and by the example of walking in relation to art in postmodernity. Walking in the social space of postmodernity and walking as art in the cultural context of postmodernity and postmodern art mirror one universal human action (walking) in its specific contemporary forms which are co-created by people and by capitalism and postmodern culture. While I consider walking in walkable urbanism to be more strongly determined through the context of capitalism and societal aestheticization, walking as art holds a promise of developing new aesthetic forms that reach beyond postmodern affirmation and toward more liberating art. While my depiction of walking shows this act of personal, physical and political agency as more and more dominated and restricted despite its imaginaries of freedom, I also sketch walking as a basis of a liberating aesthetic form in art.
18. Consequentially, a future project coming out of this research must be the creation of an audio-walk with the goal of experimenting with this new aesthetic form and its critical potential.

19. In terms of walkable urbanism, a reconsideration of the pioneering authors and designers appears necessary, asking how they estimate the difference between their initial ideas (Calthorpe and Kelbaugh 1989, for instance) and how they have been interpreted and implemented over the years or even decades.
20. I hope my study of walking in postmodernity is a contribution to shining more light on the mechanisms of society in late capitalism both in its limiting and in its liberating dimensions. For urban design and planning, I hope that my suggestion to include the societal dimension of walking might illuminate work that aims at creating a socio-spatial fabric that reaches beyond capitalism. For the performing arts I hope that my reflections on the balancing act of walking between postmodern risks and potential is insightful and inspiring for work that aims at overcoming the postmodern, post-dramatic affirmative loop and searches loopholes to break out and walk toward new aesthetic forms and new societal imagination.

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