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The Aesthetics of City Strolling

Heinz Paetzold

This paper concentrates on an eminently urban phenomenon, with the accent on *urban*. The phenomenon in question plays an important role in theories of modern urban culture. City strolling refers to the way we move along while walking through the city. City strolling often is understood exclusively under the hegemony of an optical regime, but this is one-sided. City strolling is related just as much to the bodily experience of the atmosphere of an area in the city. The paper first traces the origins of city strolling. Then it gives a phenomenological description of the phenomenon itself. A rough genealogy of city strolling follows, along with some hints for concepts of urban planning. Then the thesis is developed that city strolling is especially devoted to the exploration of the atmosphere of the city. This leads to a discussion of Michel de Certeau's "rhetoric of walking" before drawing some conclusions and hinting at a phenomenon closely related to city strolling that has become current in contemporary discussions of urban culture: street art.

1. The origins of city strolling

City strolling is the most adequate translation of the French term *flânerie*. It is undoubtedly one of the outstanding characteristics of modern urban culture. Originating in nineteenth century Paris, city strolling had an early apogee in the period between the Revolution of 1830, on one hand, and the rise of department stores together with the construction of Baron George Eugène d'Hausmann's grand boulevards in the 1850s and 1860s, on the other.

This first apex of the practice of city strolling was intimately connected with the construction of arcades. As an architectural form, an arcade is a passageway. It connects broader streets that are located not far from each other. These passageways are lined with shops that display luxurious goods. Arcades are appropriately adapted to the urban fabric for they offer shortcuts to pedestrians. Defined narrowly, arcades are glass-roofed passages through blocks of houses, but they are actually public spaces on privately owned land.

Arcades are accessible to pedestrians only. Between 1799 and 1830, nineteen arcades were erected in Paris, and by 1855, another seven.^[1] Although city strolling in the narrower sense of *flânerie* originated in Paris and had its first manifestation in the arcades there, the phenomenon can be understood independent of this location.

2. A phenomenological description of city strolling

At this point it has to be asked, what is city strolling? I shall give a phenomenological description. 'Flânerie' is an aimless rambling and drifting in the labyrinth of the big, modern city. Usually city strolling begins as a simple lingering or sauntering in the city. Distinguished from jogging, which is fashionable nowadays, or from just hanging about aimlessly or going

shopping, it is a specific kind of walking activity. The repetitive rhythm of our moving feet provides the necessary confidence for our steps. I do not stroll, though, if, with body bent forward and arms going up and down, I am desperately trying to get the train, the bus, or the streetcar.

Paradoxically, city strolling is deliberately done and at the same time inscribed in a structure of aimlessly getting somewhere. In a specific sense strolling has no goal. Giving oneself over in order to be propelled by the urban crowds is one of the most delightful features of strolling. My swinging steps generate a rhythm of stability. Once this basically unintentional state is reached, more detailed and purposive observation can do its work. High stairways, steeply sloping streets, or street crossings with traffic lights are obstacles to city strolling. They are brakes, as it were, since we have to concentrate on our steps, on the slope, or on the passing traffic. If mounting or descending the stairs is automatic, as happens on the way to my own flat or office, then one cannot talk any longer about strolling.

One of the delights of city strolling consists in the activity of *poeticizing* what we come across. We invest in our power of imagination. We try to attribute meaning to the changing phenomena around us. At the urban waterfront, say, we enjoy watching the up-and-down movement of the waves. On sidewalks we turn to the window shops or to the people we are passing. In her famous book, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), the American urbanologist Jane Jacobs once called the sudden movements and changes of the life on the sidewalks "the art form of the city" and she likened it to dance. It is, she said, an "intricate ballet": the "ballet of the good city sidewalk" is performed before our eyes. [2]

Especially in Asian cities such as Seoul, we take pleasure during the evening hours in the night lighting as a structuring element of the cityscape: the red crosses of the churches, the neon lights of the shop windows and the skyscrapers. It is not by chance that a video artist such as Nam Jun Paik grew up in Seoul. Although I exemplified the poeticizing activity of city strolling by referring to viewing, we experience smell and sound while walking as well. Composers like John Cage, Steve Reich, and Hans Werner Henze, among others, made use of the noises and rhythms of urban life. Reich's composition *City Life* (1995) testifies to this. William Forsythe's choreography of *Alie/na(c)tion* (1992) describes the nervous and disoriented ways people in the modern metropolis move and listen to popular political or spiritual leaders. The sounds of, say, New York are made into an order as a melody, as repetition, as swelling. Strolling through the city, we organize the shapes of the houses in their relation to the square or the park. We hear the rattle and squeal of the trolley cars as background to our own position in urban space. City strolling differs from the Zen of walking, since city strolling lacks the strict turn toward the internal world. City strolling is concerned with the world around, of course, in its interaction with me as the moving body.

How does this ongoing poeticizing activity come into being? I believe that Ernst Cassirer's notion of "symbolic pregnance" is useful here. Cassirer defined it as follows: "By symbolic

pregnance we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain non-intuitive meaning which it immediately and concretely represents.”^[3] As Cassirer explains, symbolic pregnance does not consist in putting onto a sense datum a symbolic meaning from above. Symbolic pregnance produces a “characteristic total meaning.” The symbolic articulation is taken on by the perception itself. In a word, the symbolic pregnance signifies the beginning of all further symbolic activities. It is a first meaning, which is open to being clarified and refined symbolically. Steve Reich uses the noises of the city and gives them a structure of meaning.

It has to be emphasized that individuals, not groups, are the subjectivities who are strolling.^[4] Different from the dietetic promenade on Sunday afternoon that is done in twos, and in contrast to window-shopping in the evening or to the Italian or Croatian corso, which are group events, city strolling today is still the activity of solitary individuals. The city stroll by twos succeeds most easily in unknown cities for the reason that the two are completely devoted to viewing, hearing, and smelling in order to grasp the atmosphere of the site, the architectural scene, and the doings of the crowds on the streets and squares.

Doubtless, the rhythm of traffic on the streets and squares influences the mode of city strolling. Each individual metropolis has a rhythm of its own by which everyday life is enacted. The rhythm in New York is different from that of Paris, Singapore, Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo, or Rome. Rome is hectic, whereas the crowds in New York move forward like a torrent of lava. In Singapore, strolling is performed with an unburdened leisurely slowness. In Tokyo and Beijing city strolling has something of the smooth crowding of New York, but is more individual because of the peculiarities of the urban regions, for example Ginza in contrast to Ueno and Houhai in contrast to the area around Tian’anmen Square. Generally speaking, it remains true that the rhythm of cities is modified from neighborhood to neighborhood without losing, as it were, the ground bass of the whole city in question.

3. A genealogy of city strolling

As I said, city strolling lacks the turn toward the internal world. On the contrary, it is always directed toward the atmospheric tuning of the social world and toward the architectural scene. City strolling, therefore, can take the form of a bath in the crowd, as Franz Hessel has experienced and described it. The observation of the others as well as being observed by them stands at the border of delight, but probably only on the border. The momentum of walking demands continuous progress. In contrast to Hessel, Walter Benjamin described his own strolling as compelled, even driven. Virginia Woolf attributed to city strolling the joy of leaving behind one’s established identity and submerging oneself in the democratic anonymity of city rambles. Being bathed in the crowd, being driven, and undergoing a metamorphosis of my identity are the outstanding characteristics of strolling in the metropolis of modernity. It is important to keep all these aspects in mind, though they might contradict each other.

I would like to add here my own experience of city strolling. It is a way of catching the fleeting moment. It is a turn to the ephemeral in Charles Baudelaire's sense. It exposes the "ephemeral" which, according to Baudelaire, is one side of modern urban beauty. If we stroll, we want to satisfy our desire for the curious, the unexpected and new, the fashionable, and the magical. Our curiosity is challenged and is aroused again and again.

To stroll through the city is not just to move through the city but rather to concentrate, by endless walking, on the curiosities exhibited in the displays of stores. City strolling is concerned with the atmosphere of the urban scenes on streets and squares. City strolling is not just a practice of walking and watching but also a way of theorizing and writing. It is a cultural activity. This is testified to not only by Benjamin, Hessel, Siegfried Kracauer, and Woolf, but also by Robert E. Park. The latter became the founder of the Chicago School of urban studies during the 1920s and was a passionate stroller, as well. He strolled through city scenes and different social environments in order to come to grips with the various urban worlds. To a certain degree one could argue that the European *flâneur* was obsessed by the idea of comparing the contemporary city with its historical forerunner. The American *flâneur* of the Chicago School, in contrast, stuck much more straightforwardly to the present.

City strolling is by no means a thing of the past. It has its contemporary defenders in poets like Colson Whitehead, author of *The Colossus of New York* (2003), Cees Noteboom, Eric de Kuyper, and Dubravka Ugresic, among others, and its theoreticians in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Zygmunt Bauman, and Michel de Certeau. Bauman analyzed the postmodern *flâneur*, whom he relates to postmodern lifestyles such as vagabondage, gambling, and tourism, and to postmodern encounters with the stranger. In a mysterious way the stranger can make one feel anxious or invite one adventurously to further pleasures. Along with Henning Bech, Bauman stresses the erotic-aesthetic qualities of moving within a crowd. It is, as it were, the anticipation of bodily touching.^[5]

4. Some concepts of urban planning

There is no doubt that the practice of city strolling is one of the characteristic traits of modern urban culture. The aesthetics of urban life has to encompass it as one of its important components. Such aesthetics furthermore would also have to focus on the layout of the modern city. The architectural style of houses, department stores, office buildings, and museums is important, as are the relationships between streets and squares, metro lines and parks, shopping malls and theaters.

In the Western world, modern *urbanism*, as the discipline of city-planning, had its origin in Ildefonso Cerda's *Teoría General de Urbanización* (1867). Cerda proposed a new design for Barcelona and reflected on the foundations of city design theory. Camillo Sitte's *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889), with its return to medieval and Renaissance city design concepts, Ebenezer Howard's *A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1899), with the idea of the garden city and, of

course, Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* (1925), with its much applauded concept of functionalist urban design, were milestones of urbanism in the West. Functionalism, however, has had a worldwide impact. Urbanism has to be understood as both the theoretical discourse as well as the practice of giving shape to the urban environment.

After the 1960s, strong criticism of Le Corbusier's functionalist urban design developed in reclaiming the sidewalks along the streets for urban culture and pleading for mixed uses of urban areas. This was the thrust of Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Then the idea of the *Collage City* (1978) emerged, proposed by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, arguing that the urban architect has to be much more of a "bricoleur" than a technician. He has to be acquainted with the political and aesthetic culture of a given city and often has to design mere sections of an urban region instead of providing an overall design. City design is comparable to the collage because it has to bring together completely divergent elements. Well-known urbanologists in recent years include Aldo Rossi, Rem Koolhaas, and William S. W. Lim. However, a true and definitive post-functionalist urban design is still in the making.

5. The atmosphere of the city

I said earlier that experiencing the urban environment by strolling delivers a specific aesthetic experience: the experience of the city in its *atmospheric tuning*. The rhythm of moving affects our awareness of the atmosphere. It is difficult to determine the atmosphere of whole a city. For that reason I prefer to relate atmosphere to specific spots and places of a city: the square, the street, the railway station, the underground station, the marketplace, mall, riverside, lakeside, or the bank of a canal.

In order to come closer to the experience of the atmosphere of the city I have to introduce a conceptual distinction not sufficiently recognized in other theories. We have to distinguish between the atmosphere experienced on the one hand by entering in and participating in a group or a small unit of people, and the atmosphere experienced while strolling the city on the other hand. In the first case I experience the atmosphere, which is produced by the specific people in a room. I read in the way people are looking around and at me whether there is a relaxed, a stressed and depressed, or a cheerful and cozy atmosphere. Here the mode of interactivity between people has some spatial vibrancy, as it were. It is primarily the people in the room who color the atmosphere, which is, of course, also tinged by the color of the walls, the furniture, the size of the room, and the acoustics.

The second case is that of the urban environment. Here the architecture of the houses, the design of the street furniture, the design of the square, the pavement, the acoustics, the light (night, morning dawn, bright noon), and the activities performed by the people—all these elements are main factors for creating the atmosphere of a city spot. My loneliness or my being surrounded by the crowds around me, all these are secondary features.

Gernot Böhme's distinction between *ingression* and *discrepancy* is on a different level. This distinction deals with the way in which I experience an atmosphere. If I am won over and swept away, say, by the cheerful atmosphere of a gathering, Böhme labels this *ingression*. If my temper contrasts sharply with the atmosphere around me, Böhme calls this *discrepancy*. When mourning, for example, I experience a lovely summer day in giant contrast to my own feeling. [6]

The experience of the atmosphere of urban spots has some similarities with the experience of a stage. I can be deeply moved by what is going on before my eyes. I can keep a distance from it. The atmosphere of a square might be experienced as frighteningly wide, as a passageway, as a locality of common activities, or as an aesthetically inspiring area. [7] Geographers have shown that such a typology of atmospheric characters can be used as a basis for empirical research.

What I would like to stress is the fact that the experience of the atmosphere of urban spots is an immediate experience. It is encountered before dissecting analysis. Atmospheres take possession of us without reasoning. We experience the atmosphere first and then concentrate on the details of the scene. Atmospheres are experienced as single whole entities. City strolling is the condition of the possibility of becoming aware of the atmosphere of an urban square, an urban riverside, or a train station. It is not true that I first have amorphous sensations and that they are synthesized through the activity of my intellect. On the contrary, first is the bodily awareness of the atmosphere as a whole, and only then does the analysis of the details follow.

Atmospheres of cities are not disclosed by one sense only; rather, all of them are involved. It may be better to say that the senses fuse. Sometimes the smell is deeply impressed in memory, as is the case with railway stations and buildings in cities of the former East Germany. For that reason, one might say the experience of atmospheres is close to synesthesia.

6. Rhetoric of walking

Now for the last step of my analysis. Any phenomenology of culture today has to apply the *linguistic turn* or the *symbolic turn* to philosophy. Michel de Certeau has worked through Roland Barthes' intuition of a semiology of the city as an important factor that is relevant here. De Certeau's essay, *Walking in the City*, [8] is of methodological interest to the phenomenology of the culture of city strolling and for two reasons.

First, a qualification: many things de Certeau had to say about the urbanism of architects and city planners do not give evidence of expert knowledge. He simply overlooked the fact that we already find fruitful approaches to a semiology of the city with Ildefonso Cerdà, the founder of modern urbanism. Cerdà scrutinized the magic-poetic power of street names and the poetics of urban regions in order to better understand the growth process of cities. De Certeau, on the other hand, tended to identify urbanism simply with *functionalism*. However, this also includes a fruitful idea. De Certeau

understood his "rhetoric of walking" as the "consequence" or the "reciprocal" of Michel Foucault's analysis of the structures of power. The functionalist city, then, provides the frame of power within which the rhetoric of walking operates and is critically challenged, contested, and thwarted.^[9] Seen from the viewpoint of methodology, de Certeau mediates the urbanistic and architectonic discourse with the discourses of urban sociology and the cultural sciences.

Second, and this is even more important, de Certeau's approach sheds a completely new light on the phenomenology of strolling. The activity of walking in urban space, and especially in the literal sense of the *bodily style* of stepping with the specific kinesthetics of a concrete individual,^[10] is theorized analytically with the conceptual equipment of post-structuralist theory. Strolling is approached from the perspective of a theory of signs or symbols. Any philosophy of culture today must bring together both these poles, the phenomenological and the semiological.

Let us look a bit closer at de Certeau's approach. For de Certeau, the acts and ways of walking in the city have their equivalent in the utterance of statements. Just as each linguistic utterance implies the acceptance and appropriation of language as a system, that is, language in the sense of *langue* (Ferdinand de Saussure), each act of walking presupposes the appropriation of the topographical system of the given city. Furthermore, each pedestrian realizes a locus, a place, just as each speech act (John Searle) implies the transformation of *langue* into *parole* (de Saussure). Eventually, the illocutionary aspect of the speech act, that is, the socially binding force of speech acts, has its equivalent in the pragmatic (i.e. functional) constitution of relationships between topographic positions. Walking, then, is the "space of enunciation."^[11] The stress here is on the notion of space.

In the act of walking the individual realizes specific possibilities of the urban topography, for example, the crossing of a square and the use of back roads instead of main streets, and gives them an *appearance*. While strolling, I can, however, also invent, as it were, new possibilities of the urban space. This occurs if I take a roundabout way or improvise new routes. In these cases one has to say that the *spatial signifier* is transformed into something other than its literal meaning.^[12]

De Certeau's original idea is that we can understand the functionalist concept of the city as an established norm that has a fixed and definitive *signification*. The actual "walking of passersby" can be read as a "stylistic figure" that is in contrast to the functionalist norm. Because of their metaphorical character, stylistic figures transcend the norm that is embodied in the signified. To put it a different way, people's actual walking plays with the rules of signification prefigured by the urban system. It produces "shadows" and "ambiguities" within them.^[13]

This can be explained through an example. *Synecdoche* is that rhetoric figure by which the part represents the whole, for example, using 'head' to represent 'man.' We say, "There is a 'bright head' behind us," if we literally mean to say, "There is a 'bright man' behind us." Following these thoughts, I suggest

interpreting the style of walking of the classic *flâneur* in the Parisian arcade in the manner of a synecdoche as he takes the realm of the arcade, that is, a section of the city, for the whole of the city. The ostentatious slowing down of the speed of walking, which characterized the *flâneur*, as well as the joy of watching, are just some of the constitutive elements of the rhetorical synecdoche of the *flâneur*. For de Certeau, *synecdoche* and *asyndeton* constitute a pair. The *asyndeton* omits adverbs, conjunctions, and copula ("On your mark, get set, go!"). The *asyndeton* spares only relics of the spatial continuum. De Certeau attributed the mythical to the *asyndeton*, since both deal with eminent places, for instance, the holy in contrast to the profane.^[14]

The rhetoric of walking, de Certeau said, articulates on top of the permitted or forbidden literal meaning of urban spaces a "second, poetic geography."^[15] It is striking how some of Benjamin's reflections become analytically precise and sharp if we translate them using de Certeau's remodeling. This brings Benjamin's ideas to the point. Benjamin was already dealing with the magic of street names. Because I have lived for more than twenty years in the Netherlands, the Dutch way of classifying city regions by using the names of statesmen or naval heroes for streets still bears an auratic magic for me.

The neighborhood of the city where I used to live in Amsterdam was named *Staatsliedenbuurt*, that is, "statesmen quarter." I dwelled in the *Van der Hoopstraat*, which means not "The Street of Hope" but alludes to the statesman, Van der Hoop. This was the Dutch lawyer, public prosecutor, and minister Joan Cornelis van der Hoop (1742-1825), who served his country under different political regimes. The anarchistic party that settled in the *Staatsliedenbuurt* called itself ironically '*Staatsverlangen*,' which means "desire for state."

According to de Certeau, "three distinct (but connected) functions of relations between spatial and signifying practices" include such "symbolizing kernels" as "the believable," "the memorable," and "the primitive." His conclusion is that "These three symbolic mechanisms organize the topoi of a discourse of the city (legend, memory, and dream) in a way that [...] eludes urbanistic systematicity."^[16] In other words, the symbolism of street names and names of regions makes the places of a city inhabitable. They recall or suggest "phantoms" that are concealed in the "gestures" and in the style of walking of the people. They denominate a history. Think, for instance, of the nervously restless gestures of bank employees in the center of the cities where stock exchanges and many banks are located. These gestures can be found not only in the buildings but also on the streets. It is unnecessary to underscore that a division of city regions according to numbers would destroy all the poetics of the urban spaces, even if such a division would advance urban administration.

De Certeau's rhetoric of walking, of which I presented only a few aspects, derives from the presupposition that *discourse*, meaning what Émile Benveniste calls *language*, that is the language "as it is assumed by the person who is speaking and in the condition of intersubjectivity," and *dream* resemble each other. Language and dream are based on the use of the same "stylistic procedures" respectively, the same modes of symbolization. The most important of these are

"displacement" and "condensation." Since language and walking correspond to each other, the extension of language through dream applies as well. Discourse, dream, and walking share a comparable "register of expression."^[17]

Summarizing this, I would say that de Certeau's rhetoric of walking has a bearing on urban theory because it gives evidence of the anarchistic drift behind strolling. Furthermore, rhetoric, or a poetics of walking is relevant because it testifies that each cultural activity, including walking, is a process of coding and recoding. This is, of course, a Foucaultian idea.

The consequence of this is that atmospheres are symbolically coded. But how does this happen?

Here I would like to return to Cassirer's notion of "symbolic pregnance." This notion signifies a first coding of symbolic meaning. It is not the case that I have a sensation in the first instance and that in a second step I attribute a meaning to it.

On the contrary, all sensations are already loaded with a symbolic meaning. The atmospheric character of a scene is experienced immediately without the interpolation of a concept. It is perceived as frightful, as beautiful, as friendly, or as captivating. These are characteristics of atmospheres. It might be that while strolling I am not completely clear about the particularity of the atmosphere I am emerged in. This suggests that experiences with art works can help me become aware of the specific kind of atmosphere I am affected by.

7. Conclusions

This seems the proper place to draw some conclusions. First of all, city strolling discloses the realm of the city from the viewpoint of the use and appropriation of urban facilities and the urban form. Historically, the first poet in the West to reveal modern urban life in poems was Baudelaire. His work *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1868) was a work of art neither about nature nor love nor God but about urban life. Urban life has been the subject of films, photographs, music, novels, etc. since the dawn of modernity. All this is true enough.

I would like to point to another thread of my narrative. The avant-garde group of the *Situationist International* around Guy Debord, Asger Jorn, Constant and others practiced the "dérive."^[18] The Situationist *dérive* is closely related to city strolling. Its purpose was to reveal the diversity of the regions of one city.^[19] In consequence of this line of thought, theoreticians such as Barthes and Henri Lefebvre pointed to the specific qualities of urban life that are to be saved by *dérive* and city strolling: adventurousness, the unexpected, the stage for meeting unknown people. City strolling, in one word, brings back and makes alive what characterizes the modern city in its post-functionalist shape. For Barthes, the eroticism of the city can be identified with the "sociality" of urban life. The city integrates people with completely diverse backgrounds and completely different intentions. This belongs to its very structure. "The city," Barthes argued, "is the site of our encounter with the other," and he continued that "it is for this reason that the center is the gathering point of any city; the city-center is instituted above all by the young, the adolescent."^[20]

Lefebvre qualified the urban form as the simultaneity of the divergent and different, on the one hand, and the

“encounters” of the unknown, on the other.^[21] Political philosopher Iris Marion Young picked up Barthes’ notion of eroticism as a qualifying marker of city life. She gave a new twist to this concept by bringing it together with the idea of pleasure caused by the experience of social difference on the one hand and by aesthetic surprise on the other. Young said that erotic attraction derives from a strong sense of commonality shared by a political community. “In the ideal of community, people feel affirmed because those with whom they share experiences, perceptions, and goals recognize and are recognized by them; one sees oneself reflected in the others.” This ideal of commonality, however, may have applied basically to smaller republican communities in early modernity, say in a city like Geneva. It no longer fits the scale of the modern big city that has become a city of strangers.

Here we take pleasure, as Young says, “in being drawn out of oneself to understand that there are other meanings, practices, perspectives on the city, and that one could learn or experience something more and different by interacting with them.”

Ultimately, city eroticism in our time has two sources. One derives from social otherness; the second draws from aesthetic diversity. We have to think of the grandeur of the buildings, “the juxtaposition of architecture of different times, styles, and purposes.” City space, in a word, offers delights and surprises in pulling together aesthetically varied objects and environments.^[22]

I would like to argue that city strolling has a double face *vis-à-vis* the aesthetic. On one side, city strolling strengthens the sensual and aesthetic sensibility of the subjectivity involved.

It transforms the promise implied in the work of art into everyday life and lends it a structure and style. On the other hand, city strolling offers the possibility of the freely developed perception of works of art. Yet city strolling is more than works isolated and enshrined in the museum. City strolling finds its telos in understanding and producing works of art. As Lefebvre would put it, both product and oeuvre coincide.

Having almost reached the end of my discussion, I would like to turn to a phenomenon that has become an important current of urban life these days: *street art*. Its forerunner might be the art of graffiti and political slogans on walls, houses, and official buildings during the 1970s and 1980s. The street art of today, however, has different features. Street art should not be confused with art in public spaces, for instance near a monument or in a square.^[23] Street art, in contrast, exposes the ephemeral beauty of urban cityscapes and scenes.

Here is only a rough list of some ways in which street art intervenes in the urban fabric. Street art brings into the open the contrast between boring walls of concrete and colorful pictures. Street art might consist of an ironic comment on a commercial or next to it or on a traffic sign or some significant feature of a building, say, a window or an opening at an unexpected place. The intervention of street art could remind you of well-known historical styles of art, such as surrealism or constructivism, but brought into an unexpected juxtaposition, sometimes close to what the artists of the Situationist

International had called '*détournement*,' something between diversion and subversion, as Sadie Plant put it.^[24] Street art might eventually consist in the ornamentation of a pillar of concrete.

Without any doubt, street art (if we think of the American artist and activist Dan Witz, for instance) furthers and stimulates our aesthetic sensibility.^[25] It is the art experience of the contemporary stroller. Street art is not for eternity and for the museum but reacts to the now-ness of the given moment and a given constellation in the urban life of a specific city. Street art has mostly a poetic-political import. If we concede that street art advances our aesthetic sensibility, then we can argue that street art allows either the possibility of appreciation as art proper or that it transforms art into everyday life in the context of the modern big city.

Heinz Paetzold

Heinz Paetzold worked in the areas of aesthetics and philosophy of art, the philosophy of culture, and urban sociology, concentrating largely on German idealism, neo-Marxism and critical theory, postmodernism, and Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. He taught philosophy and aesthetics at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, the University of Hamburg, the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, and from 1999 until his death at the University of Kassel. He held visiting professorships in Japan, Norway, Poland and China and was a past President of the International Association for Aesthetics.

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Editorial note: Heinz Paetzold (1941-2012) read this paper at the international conference on "Aesthetics and Art:

Tradition and Presence" in Xuzhou, China on 21 May 2012.

The paper is the culmination of his long interest in urban aesthetics and was his last presentation before his death on June 9, 2012. The paper was a completed but not polished draft in English (not the author's native language). It has been carefully but gently edited for clarity and style, preserving the author's idiom as much as possible.

Endnotes

[1] David Frisby, "The *Flâneur* in Social Theory," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 84-85. Compare with Johann Friedrich Geist, *Passagen: Ein Bautyp des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Pestel, 1982), p. 12.

[2] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 50.

[3] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge* (1929), trans. by Ralph

Manheim. Introductory note by Charles W. Hendel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1957), p. 202.

[4] "Flânerie," writes a contemporary sociologist, "is the sociability of 'Ones' which emphasizes and preserves the separateness of the individual." And he continues by pointing to the social and cultural context of nineteenth century *flânerie*: "...it is a social practice of a generalized democratic individualism which was new to nineteenth-century Europeans. It represents the fascination with anonymity and guardedness which also manifests itself in the middle-class emphasis placed on public modesty." Rob Shields, "Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *flânerie*," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester, pp. 84-85.

[5] Zygmund Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 72-138.

[6] Gernot Böhme, *Asthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*. (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2001), pp. 46-50.

[7] Rainer Kazig, "Typische Atmosphären städtischer Plätze" in Jürgen Hasse, ed., *Die alte Stadt*, pp. 153-159.

[8] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91-110.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 100; p. 96.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[16] *Loc. cit.*, p. 105.

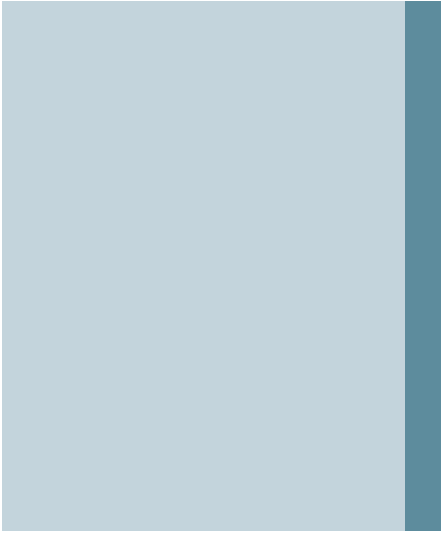
[17] *Loc. cit.*

[18] Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" in *Situationist International Anthology* revised and expanded edition, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 62-66.

[19] Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1999).

[20] Roland Barthes, "Semiology and Urbanism," in R. Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 199.

[21] Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford, U.K. and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 129, 148.



[22] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 239-240.

[23] Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space, and the City* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[24] Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 86.

[25] Dan Witz, *In Plain View: 30 Years of Artworks Illegal and Otherwise* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2010).
