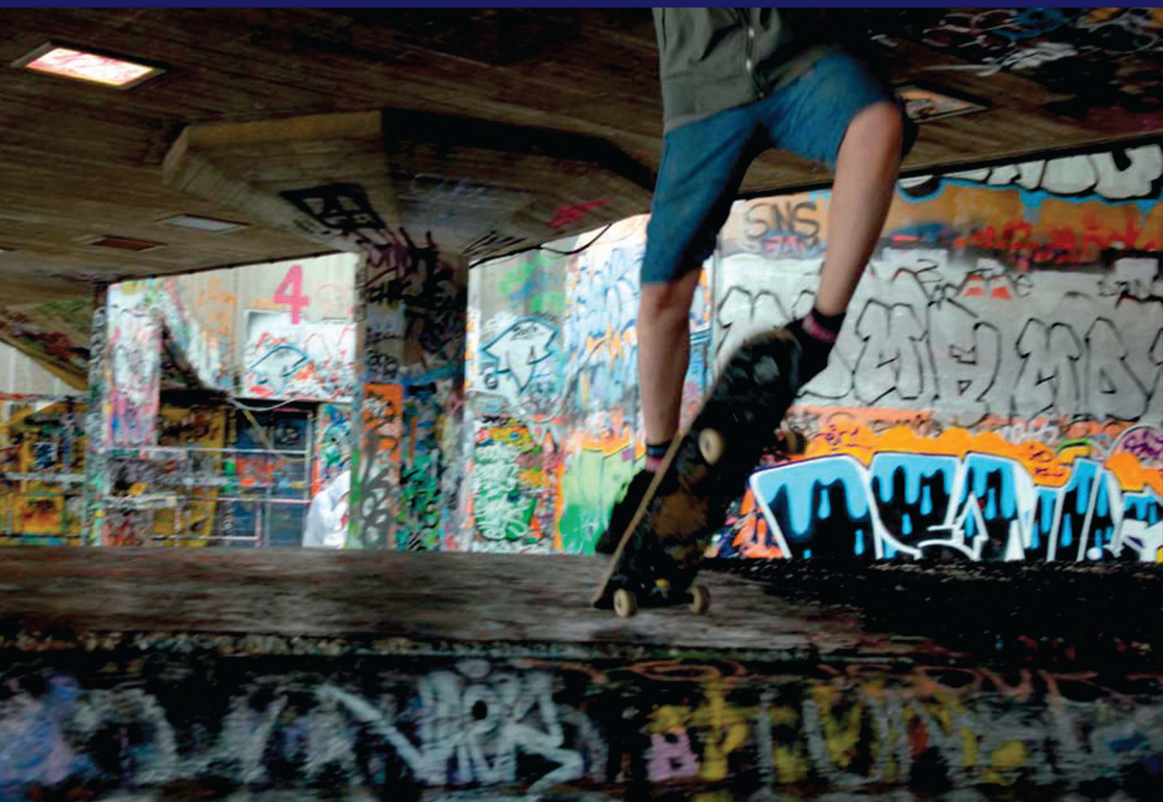# PERFORMANCE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

An Interdisciplinary Reader

Edited by Nicolas Whybrow

Performance and the Contemporary City

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Performance and the Contemporary City

An Interdisciplinary Reader

Edited by
Nicolas Whybrow

In memory of my father John Whybrow (1931–2007), who would have read this book.

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Preamble

> Marco Polo: 'You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.'
>
> Kublai Khan: 'Or the question it asks you ...'
>
> <div align="right">Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities</div>

This book takes its cue from a research-based module I have been teaching to final year undergraduates at Warwick University for some three years now. I may be quite wrong, but I have always sensed there to be a mixture in students of trepidation and exhilaration when they embark on this module. On the one hand they are anxious about the way it is premised on venturing into uncharted territory – between art forms and disciplines – emphasising in its approach to material what appears to be a suggestive, associative strategy, coupled with first-hand experiencing 'on the street'. For how can you be assessed on something as vague and cavalier as that? On the other hand they are excited by the promise of enrichment in such encounters with the unknown as well as in the development of a form of creative criticality in their practical responses to the material. Not only may the students find themselves, then, having to drift far from the disciplinary moorings of theatre and performance, as they enter the multipli*city* of urban and spatial theory, human and cultural geography, architecture, philosophy, psychoanalysis, visual art and culture, anthropology, ethnography, sociology and so on, but they are also being asked to apply creative faculties – of thinking, writing and art-making – to their enquiry into performance's relationship with the contemporary city. And, as more and more questions bubble up, they are liable – as Kublai Khan's reply to Marco Polo implies – to feel personally implicated (Calvino 1997: 44). The city is not merely something you study, but a place you *inhabit*.

As their tutor the tension described makes me nervous, too. For what if the exploratory premise – which has, by definition, always to be subject to a failure that can have many causes – simply doesn't work out? How easy under those circumstances to find oneself, in a climate of enforced fidelity to benchmarks and outcomes, on the receiving end of accusations of engendering irresponsible risk-taking: of playing fast and loose with students' immediate prospects for their degrees and their futures. However, not wishing to overstate the 'radical departure' of the module in question,

nor indeed to permit this discourse to evolve into a drawn out debate about creativity and learning in higher education – desirable and timely as that may be – I would simply maintain that in my experience students for the most part understand very well what they are signing up to. Indeed, they welcome the challenges and, even when things do not exactly 'work out', they recognise and accept the legitimacy of the terms and principles according to which they undertook those challenges in the first place. Failure or mistakes, moreover, while patently anathema to curricula couched in jargons of 'successful completion', are acknowledged frequently to emerge as productive catalysts, both in the sense of learning from them and as irregular factors: dissonances and ruptures that lead to creative insights and surprises.

But what I really mean to get round to suggesting is that the module concerned is conceived of as the performative enactment – and I use the expression advisedly – of that which it would set out to explore. In other words, it is premised in its form on opening a space of enquiry that figuratively replicates the stranger's encounter with the unknown terrain of the city. Walter Benjamin, whose spirit probably pervades every word of this publication, famously talked of the desirability 'to lose oneself in the city': a deceptively difficult 'art of straying', which calls in fact for 'a quite different schooling' (Benjamin 1997a: 298).[1] In effect, he was addressing the capacity to *perceive* or *experience* in the modern-day metropolis, urging vigilance and curiosity: to allow in the unknown by jolting perceptions of the familiar out of any banalising complacency. Hence, as the ethnographer Franco la Cecla has put it (though he signals no clear acknowledgement of Benjamin in doing so, as far as I can tell): the 'feeling of a possible and imminent danger is the sense of adventure'. For him getting lost in the city is, then, 'a condition of beginning, the need or the ground on which to start or resume getting orientated' (in Read 2000: 34). La Cecla also draws attention to the Socratean dictum that warns against 'taking yourself with you' on your travels and the danger, if you do, of 'colonising with [y]our presence every step of the journey [for] to know new places corresponds in this century with denying their difference' (ibid.: 39). Following from this, the architecture theorist Jane Rendell has drawn attention to Kaja Silverman's illuminating proposal of two diametrically opposed paradigms of identification when it comes to encountering the unknown. These are, on the one hand, '"heteropathic" where the subject aims to go outside the self, to identify with something/someone/somewhere different' and, on the other, '"cannibalistic" where the subject brings something other into the self to make it the same' (in Blamey 2002: 259).

While these various viewpoints relate to travel and identification, as well as to some extent to the physical act of walking in the city, they can perhaps be transposed metaphorically to the 'place or field of enquiry': moving in

and around or *between* the spaces of the city emerges as a possible paradigm for interdisciplinary knowing, for the way in which we may come to know and be transformed by a variety of 'unknown things'. As Rendell (2007: 46) suggests, the recent search for new epistemological and ontological discourses has produced critical texts whose language 'is highly spatialised, with words such as "mapping", "locating", "situating", "positioning" and "boundaries" appearing frequently'. Concluding that 'positionality provides a way of understanding knowledge and being as contingent and strategic – where I am makes a difference to what I can know and who I can be. (But I am not going to be there for ever.)' (ibid.), she poses a series of powerfully rhetorical questions, which echo Silverman's contrasting modes of identification and clearly synthesises 'place' and 'knowing':

> Is the interdisciplinary operator one who straddles two places, one who maps the tears and rifts, the places where things have come apart, and the overlaps and the joins, the places where things come together? Or has s/he come from elsewhere, arrived as a stranger in town? Being someone new in town is a different experience altogether. Here one place has been left and a new unknown terrain entered. What do you do? Match the new to meet up with the standards of the old, or allow yourself to be changed by your new surroundings?
>
> (Ibid.: 47)

For literary theorist Greg Ulmer, the spatial mobility of discourse implied here – and manifest in the work of radical theorists as diverse as Montaigne, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida – is reminiscent of 'the ancient topos for rhetorical invention – the walk through the places' (1989: 167). For him it is no coincidence that these theorists 'all spoke of their method in this way, having to do with journeys, paths, maps – especially with journeys off the beaten track or highway' (ibid.: 168). Indeed, pre-figuring the postmodern turn of the latter half of the twentieth century – or arguably helping to bring it about, in fact – Benjamin conducted his own highly original experiments in a conjunction of urban walking, writing and discovery. His episodic 1928 publication *One-Way Street* is a kind of 'dream dictionary for the modern urban dweller' with entries that provide profound, revelatory readings of the so-called phantasmagoria of everyday city life.[2] It is dedicated obliquely to Asja Lacis (with whom Benjamin later co-authored the meditation on the city of Naples included in this volume) inasmuch as the mythical one-way street in question is declared at the beginning to be called Asja Lacis Street after the woman, an 'engineer', 'who cut it through the author' (Benjamin 1997a: 45). Thus, the irreversible and overwhelming effect of this infiltration into the Benjaminian body

emerges for the reader in the form of an invitation to take a 'textual stroll' along that which sociologist David Frisby describes as this 'constellation or "construction" of aphorisms as a street' (in Tester 1994: 101). In a related vein, the point of Benjamin's magnum opus *The Arcades Project* was, as the political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss explains, precisely 'to bridge the gap between everyday experience and traditional academic concerns' (1989: 3). Made up effectively of a montage of reflections, aphorisms and quotations from a myriad of sources, which is organised into 36 'files' or so-called *Konvoluten* (bundles of papers) under a keyword heading, the project not only amounts to a replication of the architecture of the nineteenth-century (Parisian) arcade, and a meditation on its socio-cultural significance, but also proposes through its form an 'active writing' on the part of the reader, since it is not premised on any customary – and therefore reassuringly familiar – logics of linearity and chronology. It is a reading that presupposes a shock to the system: a deliberate disorientation that may eventually reap rewards via the startling or 'awakening' associations or, indeed, the jarring juxtapositions encountered by the meandering reader.

Benjamin's practice – for that is what it is – is certainly an inspiration. As such, it offers *something* of a model for the texts here: a portfolio (or bundle) of sometimes fragmentary documents, grouped in parts, which can be navigated in any number of ways. In fact, I would like to suggest that approaching this publication might be akin to approaching the space of the city, which, in turn, is akin to approaching the space of knowledge. As the reader, you will doubtless encounter the familiar as well as unfamiliar (to say nothing of the strangely or secretly familiar), making potential connections, it is hoped, as well as realising disjunctions. To set you on your way in the requisite frame of mind, I leave you with the writer Stephen Barber, for whom 'no city can be mapped except by the body' (2006: 24). In other words, as Benjamin too clearly believed, to know the city is to experience it physically. Having decided halfway through an epic journey from Los Angeles to Tokyo – described in his first-hand account *The Vanishing Map* – 'to spend the entirety of [the] winter traversing the cities of central Europe', Barber devises the following plan as he sits in a railway station café in Prague:

> I drew an itinerary at speed across a map of Europe torn from a magazine, tracing pencil-arrows at random through the empty gaps between cities: Budapest, Linz, Kraków, Vienna, Bratislava, Brno, determining the course of that journey without reflection, compulsively skimming the pencil over the surface space of Europe, and aware that any such mapping imposed on that surface would inevitably rectify itself into a set of diversions, deviations, pitfalls, descents and elevations. Nothing was discernable from ground level, where those cities appeared stultified and absent; instead any vision of Europe was located overhead and in its

subterranea, in movements through its altitudes and its ash-and-cinder skies, and through trackings of its urban underpasses and concealed spaces. As soon as the map of my itinerary was complete, I crumpled it in my fist, letting the nicks in my fingernails tear the paper, then carefully spread it out again, its surface now indented with a new landscape of rips, folds and furrows, the pencil lines linking the cities of Europe blurred and disjointed. That was the map I would follow.

(Barber 2006: 43–4)

Notes

1. See Part 2 for coverage of related Situationist practices of 'drifting'.
2. *The Dream Dictionary for the Modern Dreamer* (2001) is a publication by Tim Etchells, the director-cum-writer of the UK theatre company Forced Entertainment. An A–Z of entries presents a form of twenty-first century lexicon of 'everyday cultural artefacts', ranging from 'airport novels' to 'IKEA' to 'weeping on a game show'. Effectively premised on a 'writing over' of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* – as, indeed, was Benjamin's interpretation of the modern city as a dream world, according to Pile (in Bridge and Watson 2003: 81) – Etchells's definitions provide tongue-in-cheek takes on the symbolic significance of certain cultural phenomena hypothetically appearing to us in dreams. What is interesting is the tension that arises in these entries between an obviously ironic fictionality and the residual *potential* for the interpretations to ring true. In other words, though the observations are clearly made up for a laugh, something that can be said to chime with the experience of being immersed in 'western popular culture' frequently emerges unexpectedly. Thus, where Freud was preoccupied with rational explanations of the psyche of the individual – in which, for example, he fancied he could lead the dream appearance of a horse back to the domineering father that was meant in reality – Etchells is tapping into a form of collective or popular un/consciousness and implicitly demonstrating the extent to which this particular reality is dependent on the operation of a certain fictionality to come about. In fact, the title itself of the Forced Entertainment CD-Rom *Imaginary Evidence* (2003) perhaps best sums up the playful interdependency of what I am talking about. Moreover, one of the company's performance pieces, *The Travels* (2002), is also pertinent here: in effect its performance tells the story of how the piece itself came into being. The performers narrate how each one of them was tasked with visiting certain streets in the UK with particularly resonant names – Harmony Street, Cutthroat Alley, Love Lane, Rape Lane, and so on – as a form of first-hand research, and to bring back tales of their experiences (see Helmer and Malzacher 2004: 188). Hence, a form of 'getting lost as a condition of beginning', as discussed above, serves as the point of departure for what then evolves into 'evidence gathering' or 'witnessing the scene' – reminiscent perhaps of the practices of forensics or archaeology – emerging finally in performance almost as the 'relating of a bad dream' (or 'trip'), a kind of fictional documentary.

Introduction

> Most of us live in cities; it is the urban, the congregation of strangers, which defines our contemporary situation.
>
> Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*

Urban populations

The simple observation above from Pearson and Shanks's interdisciplinary book is a useful point of departure, on several counts (2001: 147). For one thing, based on the assumption that the 'us' here is a universal one, it draws attention to the momentous fact that the majority of the world's population does indeed live in cities now: in 2007 the balance of urban to rural (or 'other') officially tipped irrevocably towards the former. By 2030, moreover, five billion out of a global population of just over eight billion is projected to be made up of city dwellers, with the major area of growth being in the so-called developing world. Thus, an 'exploding' city such as Lagos in Nigeria, with a current total of just over ten million, is expected to have doubled in size by 2020, making it the third largest city in the world.[1] By contrast, London will maintain the equilibrium of its present population of some eight million, and an advanced mega-city like Tokyo, which already has a staggering population of 35 million – the world's largest at the time of writing – is set to rise by a mere million in the same period (UN-HABITAT 2006: 8).

The global *differences* of growth rate are nowhere more marked than in the statistic that nearly a third of current city inhabitants live in slums, of which 90 per cent are in the developing world (ibid.: 11). The very nature of slums – officially defined *in part* as dwellings lacking sufficient living space (ibid.: 19) – makes clear, in turn, that one-third of the global urban population lives in circumstances of extremely high density. A high population in any one city of the developing world does not, therefore, imply a corresponding expanse of available space. Cities such as Cairo and Mumbai have residential densities of around 35,000 per km² as against 4,500 in London, for example. Mexico City by contrast, which has experienced a massive increase in population size since the mid-twentieth century – currently around 19 million, the bulk of which lives in poverty – has a density not that much higher than London's owing to its geographical positioning on a high plateau, which permits low-rise sprawl (*Global Cities* exhibition information, Tate Modern, London, 20 June to 27 August 2007). As such, it is important to bear in mind, on the one hand, that a rising urban demographic

brings massive problems of overcrowding with it and, on the other, that contextual or local factors diverge enormously, producing quite distinct cities in terms of socio-economic and cultural/human geographic infrastructure.

The tension between a *perception* of trans-urban homogenisation in an age of globalisation and the *actual* specificities of local cultures is not one that should be suppressed then, as it might be, by reference to a universal 'us'. In the same way that it is still a majority of the world's population that does not in fact have the means to take advantage of digital communications technologies in all their various forms, so it is that there are vast discrepancies of wealth and amenities in urban centres around the globe. So, yes, most of us live in cities now, but most of 'us' are not even indirect beneficiaries of the first order of global finance and power. In fact, most of 'us' probably find ourselves at its mercy, so to speak: condemned as a member of 'the rest' or 'other world' to serve the interests and merely feed off the scraps of a dominant minority. (And I hasten to point out my own privileged position in sketching this scenario. Alone, the fact that I *can* sketch it in these perspectival terms is doubtless indicative of that.) Even within the 'secure confines' of, say, Europe there are considerable discrepancies of opportunity. Identifying the states of the former Soviet bloc as 'postmodern serfs, providing low-wage labour for the factories where the clothes, electronics and cars are produced for 20–25 per cent of the cost of making them in Europe', Naomi Klein describes the symbiotic mechanism of the new 'fortress continents' as

> a bloc of nations that joins forces to extract favourable trade terms from other countries, while patrolling their shared external borders to keep people from those countries out. But if a continent is serious about being a fortress, it also has to invite one or two poor countries within its walls, because somebody has to do the dirty work and heavy lifting.[2]
>
> (Klein 2003: 23)

As the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, Klein's succinct analysis not only applies to Europe but is replicated in North America, for instance, where an arrangement between the USA and Mexico witnesses the latter 'policing its southern boundary to effectively stop the tide of impoverished human waste flowing to the US from Latin American countries' (Bauman 2004: 20). Thus, as Klein concludes, you stay *open for business* by expanding the perimeter and *closed to people* by subsequently locking down (Klein 2003: 23).

Urban bodies

The second main point to make, therefore, regarding Pearson/Shanks's quotation, is that it is the urban in all its *complexity* and *diversity* – more

often than not produced by inequalities – which defines the contemporary circumstances of humanity as a whole. In fact, it may not be exaggerating the matter to say that the question of the city has superseded the preoccupation in recent decades of arts and humanities critical discourse generally with the signifying body as implicated and expressive, indeed performative, locus. Instead, so the argument might go, it is cities that have become the prime indices of a fast-changing super-modernity. Importantly, however, one should not lose sight in claiming this precisely of Pearson/Shanks's 'congregation of strangers': the body has not been replaced at all but *re-placed*, wandering en masse into the space of the city (not for the first time, of course), performing *in situ*, a relational body or 'switching station' that acts within and is acted upon by its urban surroundings. Thus bodies can be said to both *produce* and *be produced by* the city. And while cities obviously contain bodies, bodies also contain cities. In fact, the city itself functions as an ecological body, one that *facilitates* the circulation of particular socio-economic and cultural discourses while also thereby *delimiting* them. In other words, the various component parts of a city – its built environment, cultures, peoples, networks of communication and so on – operate interdependently, producing – but importantly also restricting or suppressing – possibilities of expression, identification and, in a more acute sense, survival via any number of visible and invisible interactions and overlaps.

In this sense cities can be said always to be 'on the move'; bodies, moreover, move because the city does, and vice versa. The notion of characterising cities according to their physical 'mobilisations' – how things and people moved or behaved within them – was a central concern of Walter Benjamin's in what might be called his dialectical 'thought experiments' (*Denkbilder*) relating to diverse European locations. For example, the improvisational 'porosity' of Naples, in which he observed a form of interchangeability between 'inside' and 'outside', private and public living; or Moscow's interpenetration of the technological on the one hand and the primitive on the other. Meanwhile, Benjamin's major work, the fragmentary *Arcades Project* – in the dual sense of being both unfinished and made up of fragments – centred on the nineteenth-century Parisian arcade as ruin. Once an architectural site promising the fulfilment of urban dwellers' desires, it had come to epitomise, for Benjamin, the transiency and inherent 'will to decay' of capitalism by the early twentieth century. Like the arcade itself, figures such as the *flâneur*, who seemed to operate on the cusp of such transitional 'moments', intrigued Benjamin for the way they embodied the contradictions of evolving urban conditions: a man immersed in the crowd, yet alienated from it. And the archetypal figure of the urban walker or 'wanderer' continues to have currency in the twenty-first century as the embodiment of the city's transiency. (Petra Küppers's contribution to Part 1

critiques the figure of the modern-day *flâneur*, specifically with regard to its gendering.)

As we have seen in relation to population figures specifically, cities change at differing rates and for a multitude of reasons, in some instances significantly revising their own physical or ecological constellations in the process. Like bodies they alter their appearance, growing and shrinking, renewing themselves, decaying 'naturally', being razed or 'quaked' to the ground, or dying out completely. Los Angeles is known to some as the hundred mile city, owing to the way it stretches endlessly along its smog-smothered valley, with no discernable single 'city centre' (Sudjic 1992). Another US city, Detroit, possessed a modern 'civilising centre' as little as half a century ago, but effectively lost it. With so-called 'white flight' in the 1960s and 1970s – a term which masks a plethora of complex, interconnected socio-economic and cultural factors – it deteriorated rapidly into a vast ghost town of abandoned civic, commercial and residential buildings as its white working- and middle-class demographic migrated to the city's suburbs: a modern industrial city with a large void at its core. The same can be said of Tokyo, but for very different reasons. Roland Barthes writes in his detailed account of the world's largest city – entitled *Empire of Signs* – that its spatial centre, the forbidden residential parklands of an unseen Emperor, are far from being an expression of power. Instead, having an 'evaporated notion' at the heart of the city has the function of 'giving the whole movement of the city the stabilising benefit of its central emptiness, permanently forcing traffic to be diverted. In this way … the system of the imaginary circulates via detours and return trips around an empty subject' (Barthes 1982: 30–2). Arguably there is a philosophical principle at stake here, which relates to notions of absence and presence as the respective progenitors of 'social being'. In both instances, though, a performative premise applies. In other words, the constellation of the urban installs constitutive effects and behaviours in the body of the citizenry. And these implicitly render ways of being in the city 'inconceivable' as much as they do conceivable. Barthes's concern is to contrast the discursive modes of the 'oriental void' and the (European) occidental one, which is built around 'space-filling plenitude' or presence: a holistic urban core in which certain identities are made available to or are sought by the citizen via the concentric arrangement of 'civilising institutions'. These are articulated through the built embodiments of spirituality (churches), power (offices), finance (banks), goods (shops) and general 'language flow' (cafés, bars). The implied security of that particular form can be violated, of course, in all kinds of ways: having been split down the middle for 28 Cold War years, Berlin is still engaged in a process of attempting to 'centre itself' again. When the Wall went up in 1961, it

was West Berlin that ended up 'emasculated' in terms of those centralising institutions. As a result there was no up or down town to which one might take oneself. The tendency was for neighbourhood clusters to form and key civic amenities existed randomly in all parts of the enclave. When the Wall tumbled in 1989, the problem for the conjoining city was often how to negotiate the inevitable duplication of key institutions that had resulted.

I could go on when it comes to the performative morphology, texture or substance of cities: Venice by design the eternal floating city (just), New Orleans on the other hand by 'natural accident' – supposedly compounded by wanton political failure – the temporarily flooded one. But there are too many resonant examples to list, and I assume the sense of what is being said is probably clear by now. To make something of a theatrical analogy: cities take forms in which specific kinds of showing and looking, doing and interacting occur. In short, and at the risk of sounding trite, they are places in which things happen in a multitude of ways, and the ways in which they actually *do* happen are what determines how these cities and their inhabitants (are permitted to) *become what they are*, but they are not always going to remain that way.

Urban rights: theatre/play

In this respect I have always found a wholly irregular expansion of the German word *Schauplatz* quite useful. Meaning literally 'a place for viewing' and/or 'showing', and hence a kind of theatre, it signifies the 'event-site' or 'arena of operation' in everyday usage. In other words, it is where important things are 'going down', where spectacles take place, where the cut and thrust of 'battle' may occur. By usefully corrupting the term to *Schau-spiel-platz* you make explicit the degree to which performance is intrinsic to such 'scenes' or events. Thus, the urban *Schauspielplatz* or 'place of performance' is an integrated location in which there is both 'staged drama' or 'drama for show' (*Schauspiel*) and play(ing) (*spiel[en]*). Importantly, where the former may suggest it is conducted 'officially', for or on behalf of the spectator-citizen, the latter involves the spectator-citizen's participation in the playground (*Spielplatz*) that is the 'unofficial' or 'unaccounted for' city. Perhaps there is a tension in that relationship between the discursive enactment of that which is supposed to happen – or given to be enacted – and the unplanned, random, sometimes 'anarchic' play that arises as a consequence of the former's failure, inadequacy or inappropriateness. In other words, the former is premised on the idea – not dissimilar to the one that might apply to the upholding of a 'working society' – of a stable, *functioning* city, one that serves its inhabitants' needs, interests and aspirations, and

that is socially *just*. So, the city is built around the operation of certain agreements, a functional order that strives, moreover, to be moral as well as pragmatic. When it turns out not to be quite so – that is, when it turns out to be deluded about fulfilling its role in this regard, or when it implicitly disallows certain claims to or possibilities of existence – radical 'play' can assert itself in myriad ways, challenging the city's authority. (The appearance of phenomena such as graffiti and its offshoots is probably the most obvious example of this, as we shall see in Part 4.)

For Henri Lefebvre, that seminal theorist of the social production of urban space, the city 'revealed the contradictions of society' (Kofman and Lebas in Lefebvre 1996: 14). In particular, as Ben Highmore succinctly puts it, for Lefebvre 'the contemporary urban everyday of capitalism is characterised by the saturation of mass cultural forms … penetrating everywhere as an act to cover and hide the discontinuities of everyday life'. But, Highmore goes on, such 'fissures in the urban fabric' – referring, for example, to 'spaces of different temporalities, outmoded spaces with distinct cultural characteristics' – existed and had the capacity precisely to 'interrupt the homogenising and hypnotising effects of capitalist standardisation through their cultural and historical differences' (Highmore 2002: 140–1). Central to a tactical, embodied response to a normative urban scene was the notion of the ludic city in the form of the 'festival' (*fête*) or 'collective game', which Lefebvre saw as the ultimate expression of social revolution. Staking his position on the city as the place in which use value is potentially preserved, resisting its subordination to exchange value – 'an urban reality for "users" and not for capitalist speculators' (1996: 167–8) – Lefebvre outlines his desire to 'restitute the *fête* by changing daily life' (ibid.: 168). In 'Right to the City', which, as the title suggests, polemically asserts the urban dweller's claim to participatory citizenship, he writes that such a 'renewed *fête*' was 'fundamentally linked to play' and involved 'subordinating to play rather than to subordinate play to the "seriousness" of culturalism. … Only relatively recently and through institutions has theatre become "cultural", while play has lost its place and value in society' (ibid.: 171). 'Theatre', it is implied, has effectively been annexed and institutionalised by a privileged, complacent constituency of society when it ought to be both situated and sought (or encountered) on the street: 'to city people the urban centre is movement, the unpredictable, the possible, and encounters. For them it is either "spontaneous theatre" or nothing. … Leaving aside representation, ornamentation and decoration, art can become *praxis* and *poiesis* on a social scale' (ibid.: 172–3). Thus, Lefebvre envisages a role for art that creatively produces the city in the interests of its citizens.

Consciously or not Lefebvre's anti-elitist proposal echoes the tenor of his compatriot Antonin Artaud's famous treatise 'No More Masterpieces',

written some thirty or forty years previously. For Artaud, the urban public 'has the sense of what is true and always reacts to it when it appears. Today, however, we must look for it in the street, not on stage. And if the crowds in the street were given a chance to show their dignity as human beings, they would always do so' (Artaud 1974: 57–8). Moreover, Bertolt Brecht, that other pillar of twentieth-century theatre innovation, whose entire theory of epic theatre is premised on taking seriously 'that theatre whose setting is the street' (as the poem 'On Everyday Theatre', dated slightly earlier than Artaud's statement, puts it), is none too far from this impulse either, as we shall see (Brecht 1976: 176).

Psychogeography

If the likes of Lefebvre seem to be addressing the socio-political dimension of the *Schauspielplatz* of urban existence at the level of conscious engagement, a significant psycho-analytical and geographical aspect relating to this hybrid term is brought into play by Steve Pile via a well known Freudian anecdote. Employed as an example in the psychoanalyst's famous essay on the 'uncanny' to illustrate his personal experience of the so-called 'strangely familiar' within the space of an 'unknown city', Freud narrates the following tale of 'circular walking' on a hot summer afternoon in Genoa:

> I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow streets at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without inquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery.
>
> (Freud 1990: 359)

The compulsive, subconscious return outlined in this event is understood as repeatedly performing the transition from desire to fear: 'his desire to know and his fear of knowing', as Pile describes it, adding: 'for Freud uncanniness is linked to boys' feelings about women's genitalia – both as archaic site/ sight of desire and the site/sight of evidence of castration … a desire to be (w)hole and a fear of being punished' (in Borden et al. 2002: 265–6). Be that as it may, the fear of punishment can alternatively, or simultaneously, be equated with the fear of public exposure: being outed as subconsciously desiring that which is morally frowned upon by society. Importantly, though,

Pile points elsewhere to the way in which 'The city becomes the "*show place*" of [Freud's] desire/fear. More than a stage on which the vicissitudes of mental life play out, *the city constructs the experience* (in mind and body)' [my emphases] (in Bridge and Watson 2003: 81). Although Pile's piece on 'Sleepwalking in the Modern City' features in Part 1 of this volume (for good reasons), the notion of place producing psychic responses naturally introduces the important realm of psychogeography, which is covered in Part 2 in specific relation to Situationism. As the introduction to this part strives to show, the Situationists' aims certainly had socio-political change in cities in mind, but their preoccupation was with the complex role of desire in the playing out of any such revolution. Rather than a rational blueprint for an improved urban ecology, the Situationists proposed 'disruptive mappings' premised on spontaneous encounters and events, as we shall see.

Between disciplines

Squeezing a further drop out of Pearson/Shanks – though less from the quote with which I began than their joint book as a whole – I would wish to ally the present volume with the interdisciplinary premise of their endeavour. The latter concentrates its energies on theatre and archaeology explicitly, but stretches beyond those fields to incorporate aspects of anthropology, architecture and myth, to whisper nothing of human/cultural geography and cartography. The tell-tale use of a forward slash in *Theatre/Archaeology*, moreover, already points graphically to some form of intersection or act of 'going over' (otherwise the link would have been made by 'and').[3] Like Benjamin's pertinent declaration that 'memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre' (1997a: 314), archaeology too is performed or 'given life' in and by its mobilisations in the present. In its attempt to calibrate that to which the past might amount, archaeology is dependent on performance for it to *come about* or *become*. Not only that, but the method of enquiry of *Theatre/Archaeology* clearly exploits the intersection of theory and practice, suggesting by implication that the former can indeed be the latter and vice versa, to the extent that the structural opposition of the two begins usefully to disintegrate. Pearson, strictly speaking the 'theatre' half of this authorial double-act – though I threaten to destroy precisely the position I have just established by asserting that – casts himself above all as an artist who, typically, might draw on his immediate experience of walking in the city (in this instance Copenhagen) 'as a kind of anthropological and archaeological enquiry … to reveal the city through purposeful activity' (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 147). (The approach hinted at here is a central concern of Part 1, Walking/Theatres.)

Returning to the tenor of the present book's preamble for a moment (named so with deliberation in case you missed it), there are of course any number of ways of organising a reader relating to the city. As I have suggested, the plethora of possibilities is redolent of the multiplicitousness of cities themselves. Thus there are anthologies of texts that variously use culture, architecture, social sciences, gender, postmodernism, the 'unknown', hieroglyphics and so on as their conceptual or thematic framing devices for a critical contemplation of urban space. Striking in all of these publications is not only the range of disciplines officially represented by the contributors – even if it is billed, say, as a reader in architecture theory – but also the degree to which these writers are compelled to articulate themselves by recourse to fields outside of their supposed expertise: geographers on art and performance, anthropologists on the built environment and so on. In fact, it would be true to say that a primary motive in putting together a reader on performance and the contemporary city is, to some extent, to reclaim the term 'performance' for the field of performance given its frequent application in other discourses on urbanity, while simultaneously acknowledging the desirability of actively upholding the interdisciplinary methodology of much of this work.

One compilation of texts I am particularly fond of – in fact, I would go so far as to admit my considerable envy of the editors for the inventiveness of its conceit – is entitled simply *City A–Z*. Describing itself as being 'a contribution to a wave of experimentation which is concerned with writing the city' (Pile and Thrift 2000: xiii), the editors have collaged together a lexicon of entries – several per letter of the alphabet – relating to the urban experience (perhaps this too is a form of 'dream dictionary'). You can drift at your leisure from 'air' to 'airports', 'dream' to 'dust', 'tourists' to 'traffic lights', each entry penned by a different author. One of the several suggested modes of reading is provided by a metro map of 'entries-as-stops' inside the back cover of the book. These form specific urban 'themes-as-lines': for example, 'dis/order', 'nature', 'pleasure'. The approach is acknowledged to be influenced by Simon Patterson's well known rewriting of Harry Beck's London Underground map – entitled *The Great Bear* (1992) – in which, for example, the Victoria Line becomes 'Italian artists', the Circle Line 'philosophers' and the Jubilee Line 'footballers'. So a form of relationship to the publication is proposed in which the premise is placed on chance encounters occurring for the 'wandering reader' along the various routes or, more resonantly perhaps, at various intersections. Arguably, then, readers are positioned to experience an enhanced, affirmative sense of themselves assembling their own urban narratives in a form of 'textual drift'.

Following from this, and for the purposes of approaching the collection of texts presented here, I would wish to highlight two key determinants, both of which direct us – finally, I promise – to Pearson and Shanks. First, regarding the layout of the book, it is organised into parts relating to certain urban *phenomena*: aspects or features of the city, as well as actions or movements within it, rather than themes. So, on the one hand there are theatres, places, things, rhythms, flows, and on the other walking, drifting, sounding, playing and visioning. I have attempted as far as possible in this title selection to imply a linkage: 'walking theatres', 'drifting things', 'playing place' and so on. Inevitably there are overlaps between these diverse aspects of the city's make-up – in the same way that streets are not strictly separate from buildings, but a form of continuation – but the active binding factor and, therefore, rationale for this, is the spatio-temporal movement implied by *performance*. This second determinant provides both the all-encompassing framework for the book – the lens through which everything is viewed and weighed – and the conceptual dynamic that serves to interlink the phenomena in question. The writer Jonathan Raban's 1970s account of modern metropolitan existence *Soft City* recognised some time ago now not only the extent to which urban living was dependent on 'performances' but also that these were frequently fleeting and imperceptible:

> in every contact with every stranger, the self is projected and exhibited – or at least, a version of the self, a convenient mask which can be looked at and listened to, quickly comprehended, easily forgotten. … It does seem to me to be a logical product of the way in which cities make us live in them, of the urban necessity of playing many parts to a succession of short-order audiences.
>
> (Raban 1998: 72–3)

Thus, the 'hard city' or 'outer shell' of the built environment is sustained by the 'softness' of human movement and (inter)activity in all its variations. But arguably 'things' such as buildings can begin to *move* too as events begin to happen in and around them. One need only think in this regard of the enormously powerful impact of Christo's famous wrapping of the highly contested Reichstag building in Berlin six years after the fall of the Wall. The event attracted a staggering five million visitors within the period of a fortnight – which is as many as Tate Modern in London receives in a year (and *that* is considered overwhelming) – marking the transition of both the building and the German nation towards reunified democracy. As I have described elsewhere (in my book *Street Scenes: Brecht, Benjamin and Berlin*) in a passage worth quoting at length, what emerges as significant in Christo's piece is:

> first, at the interface between the formal functioning of the work; second, what it actually takes to bring it about; and, last, how it mobilises its

viewing constituency in the contextual circumstances – historical, political, topographical – in which it ultimately occurs. Each one of these aspects is premised on generating *movement*. Bureaucratic authorities are moved to negotiate, debate and legislate in what Christo refers to as the software stage. Spectators are moved to participate in the event physically – by being there and responding to it – and imaginatively, by speculating creatively over the broader significance of its impact. The formal act itself, finally, occurs as both a time and motion-based event. Lasting a fortnight and incorporating a three-phase process – the hardware stage – of *becoming*, then *being*, wrapped, as well as becoming unwrapped again, the estranged building also reproduces the remarkable sense of a breathing movement as the tied fabric envelops it and the wind gets under its skirts. The machinery of 'wrapping' corresponds formally in fact to the Brechtian sense of a 'staging of a veiling' in which a familiar object or circumstance is not just made strange but *shown* to be made so. The phenomenon in question both is and is not itself, replicating the Brechtian actor's *demonstration* of a character or situation and pointing to that character/situation's capacity to 'be otherwise'. Here a 'sick' building – one that is 'not quite itself' – is bandaged (or mummified), undergoing a two-week period of healing and convalescence in which it is 'wrapped as the Reichstag and unwrapped as the Bundestag' (Large 2002: 612). Effectively it has had 'the gift of life' breathed back into it, a repackaged present (or swaddled rebirthing) to the city from the artists. What you witness at each individual stage and as a whole is the ritualised performance of democracy in action.

(Whybrow 2005: 180–1)

Regarding the cultural/archaeological artefact, Shanks urges that the question, in evaluating it, be posed not in terms of '"What is it?" Instead ask "What does it do?" Enquire of its social work. … The task is to establish the relationships which make an artefact what it is' (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 53). And the 'purposeful activity' of archaeology implies dealing also 'with the gaps between things – the dirt trapped between floor tiles – documented trivia – the result of slow processes of life and death' (ibid.: 44). There is, in fact, no better exemplification of this than a 'scientific artwork' by Gail Olding, which is documented in *Breathing Cities: The Architecture of Movement* (Barley 2000). Entitled *Dirt Analysis*, the work performs a kind of urban archaeology-cum-forensic practice. Olding collected scrapings of accumulated dirt from under her fingernails having spent a period of time in five separate European cities. These she placed in Petri dishes and sent off for formal forensic analysis. The results revealed distinctive differences that implicitly proposed 'the very singular presence of each city'. Thus, 'in Amsterdam diamond dust was detected. Traces of red, white and blue fibres were found in Paris, and residue from diesel fumes were prevalent in Berlin. … As the analysis shows, the city is ingested by us, consumed by the body' (in Barley 2000: 77).

For Shanks, then, attending to the materiality of the cultural artefact corresponds to maintaining

> a sensitivity to its historicity, its life and the way it gathers many sorts of things, people, feelings, aspirations. The assemblages respect no absolute distinctions between cultural categories, such as things and people, values and materials, strategies and resources, architectures and dispositions. And in this archaeological cyborg world we will have to talk a great deal of 'might' and 'if', of slippage and fluidity, of mess and what is missing, of gaps and bridges between different worlds, of time breaking up, moments lost and regained. We will need our dramaturgical imagination.
>
> (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 101)

So it is with the performance of the global cultural phenomenon that is the contemporary city, a living machine in which, as the artist Richard Wentworth once casually remarked to me, 'everything you see and hear is the consequence of a decision'. Thus, cities are *made* by human beings, even if the 'decisions' that have driven that making have often been unconscious ones. As cultural artefacts cities similarly recontextualise or 'write over' the relics and memories of their pasts in the present, while also constantly seeking out that which is new and generating material visions for the future. Of course, in making such a general claim, I realise that I may well be falling into the 'universal we' trap with which I began this introduction. I would wish the reader to keep in mind at all times, therefore, an assumption of geocultural diversity and difference in the way cities relate to performance. By the same token I am only too aware that this selection here reflects – simply because I cannot hope adequately to cover 'everywhere' – a bias towards events and phenomena relating to certain kinds of cities – London enjoying a particular prominence in this regard – as well as certain kinds of discourses around cities. Being based in a privileged UK/European context I fully acknowledge that this anthology will not manage to address directly all manner of relevant issues arising in cities around the world. One need only point out the lacking coverage of the 'broken city' that is Baghdad to underscore the point. However, I sincerely hope that there is much to be gained from the examples that *are* given, precisely because of the places to which they may refer but also over and above their specific localities.

Notes

1. Fascinated by the implications of this rapid expansion in Lagos, the architect Rem Koolhaas has engaged – as part of an investigation into the state of world urbanisation entitled the 'Harvard Project on the City' – in a long-term exploration of 'the hidden logic that makes a "dysfunctional" city function' (DVD notes, *Lagos Wide and Close: an Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, Amsterdam: Submarine, 2005: 1).