

Walk this Way:

The Urban Interventions of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the act of walking in the contemporary performance art of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato. Theorized as a way for each artist to achieve an unmediated bodily engagement with the morphology of the city, this thesis demonstrates how walking can be employed as an artistic act, as well as mode of cultural resistance that reinvigorates everyday life with moments of poetic creativity.

This research aims to elucidate the political, aesthetic and theoretical implications of Borsato and Alÿs's work. Drawing firstly on theories of urbanism put forth the by the Situationist International, secondly on Michel de Certeau's philosophies on everyday life, and finally on Patrice Loubier and Kathleen Ritter's concept of the furtive practice, Alÿs and Borsato's interventions are shown to exist at once within the long art-historical tradition of the artist-as-walker, and on the cusp of one of the newest developments in contemporary art. Through the examination of the urban interventions of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato, the subversive, creative and critical potential of walking will also be revealed.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	14
Chapter Two.....	30
Chapter Three	63
Conclusion	98
Figures	102
Bibliography	127

List of Figures

Chapter One

- Figure 1.1 Ivan Chtcheglov *Métagraphie*, 1952.
Figure 1.2 Guy Debord *Guide psychogéographique de Paris*, 1957 & *The Naked City*, 1957.
Figure 1.3 *Surrealists gathering at Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris April 1921*, 1921.
Figure 1.4 Draft of invitation for the first visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, c. 1921 & Flyer invitation for the first visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, c. 1921.
Figure 1.5 Le Corbusier *Unité d'Habitation*, 1946-52.

Chapter Two

- Figure 2.1 Francis Alÿs *The Leak*, 1995.
Figure 2.2 Francis Alÿs *The Thread (Loser/Winner)*, 1998.
Figure 2.3 Diane Borsato *Touching 1000 People*, 2000.
Figure 2.4 Francis Alÿs *El Colector*, 1991-92
Figure 2.5 Diane Borsato *How Easy it would be to be Garbage*, 2002.
Figure 2.6 Francis Alÿs *Paradox of Praxis (sometimes doing something leads to nothing)*, 1997.
Figure 2.7 Francis Alÿs *Railings* 2000.
Figure 2.8 Diane Borsato *Rolling on the Lawn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA)*, 2000.
Figure 2.9 The Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

Chapter Three

- Figure 3.1 Diane Borsato *Touching 1000 People*, 2000.
Figure 3.2 Francis Alÿs *Narcotourism*, 1996.
Figure 3.3 Diane Borsato *How Easy it would be to be Garbage* 2002.
Figure 3.4 Francis Alÿs *The Profit*, c. 2004.
Figure 3.5 Francis Alÿs Drawings for *Railings*, 2004-2005.
Figure 3.6 Francis Alÿs Sketch for *Railings* 2004-2005.
Figure 3.8 Francis Alÿs Postcard from *The Leak*, Paris, October 2003.
Figure 3.9 Francis Alÿs Postcard from *El Colector*, 1991-92.
Figure 3.10 Francis Alÿs Postcard from *The Leak*, 1995.

Introduction

“Let everyday life become a work of art!”¹

“Rarely is walking considered as a distinct mode of acting, knowing, and making. As its necessity diminishes and its applications rarefy, the potential of walking as a critical, creative, and subversive tool appears only to grow.”²

Despite its ubiquitous place in everyday life, walking is an activity that has become obscured by its own functionality and practicality. It is conceived of as a simple, slow and generally inefficient mode of transportation and is often associated with those who are not able to afford other means of travel. As the pace of life quickens and more efficient and exciting forms of transportation are developed, walking has become known more and more as anachronistic, as leisurely, or a mere necessity. Rarely is this most basic action considered a rebellious action, an artistic action, a clandestine action. And yet, when conceived of as a conversation between the body and its environment, walking becomes a highly charged movement, capable of both interpreting and manipulating urban space; an embodied and active way of understanding and knowing the world. Through an examination of the act of walking in the performance art of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato, the subversive, creative and critical potential of walking will be revealed. These opening pages provide a brief introduction to the work of Alÿs and Borsato and outline the structure of this thesis. In addition, they provide a context

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, (London: Penguin, 1971), 204.

² University of Illinois, *Walking Known as Making*, Spring 2005, <http://www.walkinginplace.org/converge/intro.htm> (Accessed September 11, 2006), n.p.

for this research through a synopsis of other texts that have examined similar topics and introduce the theoretical frameworks that will be applied to the analysis of these two artists' work.

Describing his work, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs explains

I spend a lot of time walking around the city...The initial concept for a project often emerges during a walk. As an artist, my position is akin to that of a passer-by constantly trying to situate myself in a moving environment...Each of my interventions is another fragment of the story that I am inventing, of the city that I am mapping.³

Since 1991, walking has been the centerpiece of Alÿs's artistic practice, and the urban streets, especially those of Mexico City, have been his primary context. In his peripatetic approach, Alÿs drifts through the city as a way of "intervening, recording and involving himself in the urban landscape as a territory of conflicts, frictions and tales."⁴ Akin to rumors or urban legends, Alÿs's interventions in the public space of the city are ephemeral, poetic gestures that provoke alternative ways of knowing or understanding the urban environment.

Born in 1959 in Antwerp, Belgium, Alÿs was originally trained as an architect, first at the Institut d'Architecture de Tournai, Belgium and later at the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, Venice.⁵ Spurred into leaving Europe as a means to avoid service in the military, he relocated to Mexico City in the late 1980s, and soon after, began to develop what has now become a multidisciplinary artistic practice spanning the realms of performance, painting, drawing, photography,

³ Francis Alÿs, "Artist's Statement, Mexico City 1993, *Francis Alÿs: Projects + Links*, <http://www.postmedia.net/alys/zocalo.htm> (Accessed Sept 17, 2006), n.p.

⁴ Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Mutual Abuse," *Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* (New York: P.S. 1, 2002), 41.

⁵ Alÿs was born Francis de Smedt, but changed his name to Alÿs after relocating to Mexico.

sculpture and video. "When I decided to step out of the field of architecture, my first impulse was not to add to the city," Alÿs says, "but more to absorb what already was there, to work with the residues, or with the negative spaces, the holes, the spaces in-between."⁶ Focusing his attention on the residual spaces *between* architecture—streets, sidewalks, alleyways, and the negative spaces *within* it—doorways and broken windows, Alÿs drifts through the city, carrying with him a prop or a camera, with which he maps or marks his route, records the results of his walk or collects artifacts from the street. In these actions, he "individuates and makes ambiguous the 'legible' order given to cities by planners...show[ing] how everyday life has particular value when it takes place in the gaps of larger power structures."⁷ The images, characters and revelations discovered through such journeys reoccur later in Alÿs's paintings, drawings or photographs, themselves resembling scraps of memories of these actions. Through his interventions in public urban space, Alÿs gently creates an archive of urban haphazardness and of the unreasonable aspects of everyday life. Interrupting the normative use of the city, each ephemeral action adds a poetic element to daily life in the city.

Diane Borsato creates performances that focus on small, poignant moments of everyday life. Like Alÿs, she too creates ephemeral interventions within the public space of the city, focusing on brief, intimate actions that seek to change the way her eventual audience thinks of their environment, and their relationship to others. Motivated by a need "to give weight to the smallest and least entertaining of

⁶ Francis Alÿs and James Lingwood, "Rumours," *Seven Walks: London 2004-5* (London: Artangel, 2005), 44.

⁷ Simon During, "Editors Introduction to Walking in the City," *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 126.

gestures; to hold the meaning of acts in all kinds of sites and without cumbersome primary audiences; and to frame what sometimes are only movements of my mind”⁸, Borsato’s interventions in the public space of the city are based around an alternative engagement with the sites of everyday life, marking her own attempts to move through the city in a different way, exploring an alternative relationship to the space of the city. Borsato pushes normalized societal boundaries in order to re-insert her own private experiences into aspects of the everyday that generally go unnoticed.

Based primarily in Toronto and Montréal, Borsato was born in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada in 1973. She studied Fine Arts at York University, Toronto before achieving her Masters of Fine Arts at Concordia University, Montréal, and then her Masters of Art, concentrating in Performance Studies, at New York University, New York. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Communication and Culture, concentrating on Video Art, Performance and Performance Documentation at York University in Toronto. The urban contexts for her interventions are primarily that of major Canadian cities—Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal and Halifax as well as areas of France and the United States. For Borsato, the everyday spaces of the city become a site for exploring one’s relationship to the space around them. “I’m interested in everyday life, the places I live and work, and everything in between. I have always suspected that one needn’t travel to an exotic location, or construct an

⁸ Kim Simon, “Diane Borsato: Touching Science,” Gallery TPW, <http://gallerytpw.ca/publications/essays/0404-SimonK.html> (Accessed Feb 6, 2007), n.p.

extraordinary environment in order to find meaning, or even, magic.”⁹ For her, the urban environment is “a significant site to propose alternatives to ordinary, taken for granted ways of moving, perceiving, and imagining. It is about expanding everyday possibilities.”¹⁰ Her interventions are often highly subtle actions and gestures that allow her to explore a broad range of human relationships, whether they be social, political or physical, to the city. “I like to interfere with power dynamics and social taboos—only gently—but enough to point to our limits, and propose alternative modes of relating to one another.”¹¹ Borsato’s gestures carry with them a sense of whimsy and wit that, also at times border on the absurd.

Both Borsato and Alÿs’s performative practices may be characterized within the contemporary movement that Miwon Kwon has identified as ‘site-oriented practices.’ In her book One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, Kwon describes site-oriented practices as those artistic practices which pursue “a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues (blurring the division between art and non-art, in fact).¹² These site-oriented practices differ from site-specific practices that were developed in the mid-to-late 20th century in that the “relationship between an artwork and its ‘site’ is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship...but rather on the recognition of its unfixed impermanence, to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting

⁹ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

¹⁰ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

¹¹ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

¹² Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2004), 43.

situation.”¹³ This fleeting ephemerality, along with the blurring of the division between art and non-art, lies at the heart of the work to be investigated here.

For the purposes of this paper, I have limited myself to an investigation of artists who use walking to achieve a direct bodily engagement with the morphology of the city. In this thesis, the city will be treated in the abstract, as a structural, built environment—it is the way that these artists interact with the *physical elements* of urban space that is of interest to me in this specific project. The cities discussed here are neither socially nor economically homogenous; however, a discussion of the complex and intricate nuances of difference within these constructed spaces is beyond the scope of this current project. I also recognize that there exists a completely other and equally broad spectrum of artists who use walking in the rural or natural landscape,¹⁴ through whose work a multitude of equally important environmental and social issues are raised. However, such artistic practices will not be discussed here. Similarly, while a multitude of artists could have been chosen for this project¹⁵, I have chosen to concentrate on the performance practices of Alÿs and Borsato, because of the ways in which their work at once mirrors and contrasts one another’s. A comparative analysis of their performances allows not only for an enhanced understanding of their interventions and documentary practices, but also for a rich, in depth analysis of the broader themes inherent in each of their work.

In Chapter One, I sketch out a historical framework of the walk as an artistic practice by outlining a brief—and admittedly tertiary—history of one group of artists

¹³ Kwon, 43.

¹⁴ Such as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Janet Cardiff and Richard Wentworth to name but a selection.

¹⁵ Such as Alex Villar, Germaine Koh, Simon Leung, François Morelli and Sayaka Akiyama to name but a few.

who took a peripatetic approach to performance art. I concentrate on the politically driven work of the Situationist International, whose attempts to revolutionize everyday life in the city through a drifting walk called the *dérive* stem from the previous avant-garde work of the Surrealists, and the Dada group before them. After discussing the effectiveness of the Situationist *dérive* as a critical tool for destabilizing Modern architecture and for revealing playful moments in the everyday, I move on to outline the limitations of the Situationists' revolutionary project. In doing so, I demonstrate my reasons for shifting the theoretical framework of this paper away from their utopian conceptualizations of the walk, to the gentler, more pragmatic approach of Michel de Certeau.

The performances of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato are then analyzed in the following two chapters—Chapter Two focuses on the physical act of walking and its situation in the urban environment, while Chapter Three concentrates on the documentation and audience reception of these performances. In Chapter Two, I introduce the artistic practices of Alÿs and Borsato and theorize each intervention using de Certeau's concepts of the pedestrian speech act and the act of 'making do.' I then discuss the ways in which Alÿs and Borsato's performances provide new and interesting ways of resisting and destabilizing power structures at work within the city, using the theories of rhythm analysis put forward by Henri Lefebvre. In Chapter Three, I examine how these performances are captured and disseminated to a wider art audience, in light of their furtive nature—a concept proposed by Patrice Loubier and Kathleen Ritter. I draw out the different visual strategies employed by each artist to capture, retell and circulate the evidence of their

interventions, and consider them in light of the semiological theories of Roland Barthes as well as Marshal McLuhan's understandings of media. Finally, the visual products of these walking performances are discussed in terms of their participatory nature, and the ways in which each artwork thus destabilizes Philip Auslander's categories of the 'documentary' and 'theatrical' performance document. Theorized as a way for each artist to achieve an unmediated bodily engagement with the morphology of the city, I conclude that walking can be employed as an artistic act, as well as mode of cultural resistance that reinvigorates everyday life with moments of poetic creativity.

While there have been a number of texts written on artists who use walking in one form or another in their practice, such as the Situationist International, Richard Long, as well as the various forms of the 19th and 20th century *flâneur*, there have been few texts that attempt to address a full history of the act of walking as an aesthetic act. Perhaps the most useful, yet widely unavailable is Francesco Careri's Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice (2002), which traces the strategy of walking in art from the movements of Palaeolithic nomadic peoples to the artistic practices of Dada and Surrealism, to the Lettrists, Situationist International, Minimalism to Land Art. As a member of the contemporary walking group Stalker, Careri's interest in recording the history of walking in art is certainly genuine; however, it does become evident in the final chapter of this book that his historiography is slanted to position Stalker within this lineage. Nevertheless, I am indebted to his research, as his text has provided a great deal of context for my own project. Equally, Rebecca Solnit's Wanderlust: A History of Walking (1992)

presents a historical and sociological account of walking, yet spends very little time considering the act in terms of its aesthetic, artistic or subversive potential.

Although written material on the contemporary artist-as-walker may be scarce, there has, as of late, been a surge in exhibitions that focus on the topic; most recently *Mapping the City* (Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam, 2007), *Walking in the City: Spatial Practices in Art, from the Mid-1960s to the Present*, (Apexart, New York, 2003), *Walkways* (Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, 2002) and *Art Walks* (The Library and Archives, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002). The recent development of such exhibitions speaks to the currency of this topic; however, these group shows have taken as their task the presentation of artists and their works, with very little theoretical analysis attempted on to answer the question of *why* walking is employed as an artistic practice. Most have concentrated on the aesthetics of the walk, as opposed to offering a political or social analysis for the reasons behind the use of the walk in the first place. While Alÿs was included in *Mapping the City* and *Walkways*, Borsato has yet to be included in such an exhibition.

Francis Alÿs is a well-established contemporary artist, and as such, there have been a multitude of articles, books and exhibitions devoted to his work. Curator and author Cuauhtémoc Medina has written extensively on Alÿs throughout the entire trajectory of his career. As Medina has been linked to Alÿs for over almost fifteen years, his writings have focused on a breadth of issues, but most notably on the artist's walks and how they relate back to the social and cultural landscape of Mexico City. Curator Kitty Scott has also written extensively on Alÿs, and has

centred her writings on the artist's painting and photography—in terms of his documentary works, but predominantly on the visual art he creates *independent* of his walking-based performances. Alÿs has collaborated on over fifteen publications on his work, offering valuable insight and interpretation to theses catalogues and monographs. Most recently, Phaidon has published Francis Alÿs (2007) as part of its popular "Contemporary Artists" series that offers a comprehensive survey of his work by Medina, and articles by Jean Fisher, Russell Ferguson and Alÿs himself. As it is such an integral part of his practice, walking is often a key topic in many of these texts; yet, the rhythmic potential of his interventions has yet to be touched on, while the participatory nature of his postcard documents has only been given a tertiary examination.

Diane Borsato is an emerging artist, and as such, little has been published on her work beyond short articles, reviews and brief texts in exhibition catalogues. Kathleen Ritter has written three articles on her work, centering primarily on its furtive nature, while Patrice Loubier has considered her work alongside other contemporary Canadian performance artists in his seminal text Les Commensaux: Quand l'art se fait circonstances. Many of the articles that have been written on Borsato focus on the sensual quality of her performances—in terms of touch and taste—yet few focus on her interventions in terms of walking, or the way she moves through the city. The majority of these texts concentrate on the relational aspect of her work in terms of the people involved, but do not touch on the artist's relationship to the city. Borsato has not yet been discussed in relation to the

writings of Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, and has never been linked to Francis Alÿs.

The everyday is an area of extensive sociological, anthropological and historical study—similarly, the merger between art and everyday life has been the subject of investigation of artists and theorists since the early 1920s, as I will demonstrate in my discussion of the Parisian Dadaist. For the purposes of this research program, I have chosen to employ a highly interdisciplinary approach to the study of Alÿs and Borsato's work, borrowing from art historical studies, urbanism and linguistics as well as sociology. Primarily, my focus is on the ways in which these two artists' interventions reflect larger sociological trends, and in this area, I have relied heavily on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, as well as the insightful interpretations of Michel Gardiner, Iain Borden and Ben Highmore, who have supplied me with variant yet equally thought-provoking concepts of the everyday life in the contemporary period.

The major theoretical framework for this paper, however, will be derived from Michel de Certeau's book The Practices of Everyday Life. The reasons for choosing this text are two-fold. The first, and simplest, is that his discussion of walking is one of the key sociological texts that deals with this subject. While de Certeau's original book was written in 1974, it was only translated into English in 1984, hence his concepts and ideas are still relatively new to Anglophone readers, especially in their use in an art historical context. Secondly, and, in my mind, most importantly, de Certeau's writing was chosen here because both his writing style and his theoretical approach to the everyday mirrors the gentle, more hidden, or furtive nature of the

works created by Alÿs and Borsato. Very plainly, de Certeau's project is to analyze the production of a poetics of everyday life. While many studies on everyday life concentrate on either the representations of society, or its behavioral models, de Certeau seeks to uncover the way in which such representations or behaviors are put to use by groups or individuals in society. This can be clarified in an analogy de Certeau himself uses:

The analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behaviour) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer "makes" or "does" during this time and with these images. The same goes for the use of urban space, the products purchased in the supermarket, the stories and legends distributed by the newspaper and so on.¹⁶

For de Certeau, this "making" or "production" is to be considered a poiesis - from the Greek poiein "to create, invent, generate."¹⁷ His concern is with the inventive processes at work within everyday life and the manners in which, in circumstances that are inherently and ultimately limited, everyday life witnesses the creative potential of its individuals. At the heart of this project lies de Certeau's interest not in a radical shift in existing power structures, but rather in elucidating the creative potential within the everyday that can be found *at work within* these set structures. As Ian Buchanan has noted, for de Certeau, "the everyday itself can be treated as always already containing the possibility of carnival."¹⁸ De Certeau seeks to work within the set structures, specifically consumerism and capitalism, seeing in each situation the potential for individuals to make room for themselves, to find their

¹⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xii.

¹⁷ de Certeau, 205.

¹⁸ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 149.

own way to 'make do' with what has been allotted to them. While drawing out these creative activities from their more obscure, or illusive locations within the everyday, de Certeau also wishes to find ways to articulate them. I demonstrate in the following chapters that the works of the Alÿs and Borsato are prime examples of how this articulation is made possible. It is the poetics of everyday life that are of utmost interest not only to de Certeau, but also as I argue, to Borsato and Alÿs.

Chapter One

Walking in the urban environment has long been a strategy used by artists seeking to engage directly with the everyday spaces of the city—it did not originate with contemporary artists like Alÿs and Borsato. It is therefore important to contextualize their practices within the larger art-historical trajectory of the artist-as-walker. While this particular type of performance art can be traced down several divergent paths, I have chosen to focus on the Situationist *dérive*, as it was developed by the Situationist International (SI)—a group of left-wing individuals based largely in Paris from 1957 to 1972—through the wanderings of the Parisian Dadaists and the *déambulations* of the Surrealists in the early 20th century.¹ This route has been chosen for the way in which each group placed an emphasis on the importance of the everyday, and used walking as a way of investigating how the built environment directly impacts life in the city. Focusing on the early incarnations of the Situationist International, my aim is to demonstrate the ways in which the *dérive* was used both as an aesthetic tool for uncovering the creative potential in everyday life, and as a means of critiquing the urban architecture of Paris. Such an investigation allows for a richer understanding of Alÿs and Borsato's contemporary interventions, and establishes their lineage with other artist-walkers who have sought to engage bodily with the public space of the city.

¹ The 1950s-60s is a moment of multiple origins of walking as an aestheticized practice. One strand is certainly the explicitly politicized Situationist *dérive*. Around the same time, there also developed the walks of Wolf Vostells' through Cologne in the later '50s. His tours of Paris, which occupy a more poetic terrain, were also in dialogue with Fluxus actions in Paris and NYC. In the United States, Happenings and Allan Kaprow's writings emphasized the re-enchantment of an ever more commodified urban realm. Each of these should be distinguished the one from the other.

The Road to Revolution

In 1967, Guy Debord, the leader of the SI, outlined the primary theoretical concerns of the group in his highly influential book Society of the Spectacle. Debord argued that the commodity and its image had completely invaded all aspects of social life. He postulated that society is in fact composed of a spectacle of entertainment and consumption, a complex web that mediates social relations and ultimately, one's concept of reality. The goal of the SI—Debord, Asger Jorn, Michèle Bernstein and Raoul Vaneigem, among others—was to bring about a revolution through the subversion of the spectacle. They sought to transform the passive spectator, i.e., the everyday citizen, into an active subject by revitalising life through the construction of situations; by inscribing moments of intense experience into the otherwise mundane everyday. These situations would give one the ability to recreate life outside the alienating system of the spectacle. (The theory of the constructed situation was of capital importance for the insurrectionary Paris of 1968). Many Situationists were also highly critical of both architectural and artistic production, which they viewed as symptomatic of spectacular culture. The group wished to abolish the notion of art as a separate, specialized activity and transform it so that it became part of the fabric of everyday life.

One of the group's major concerns was the manner in which everyday life and public space were conditioned and controlled in the urban environment. In order to cultivate an acute awareness of the impositions urban design placed upon city dwellers through such things as the widths of streets, the heights of buildings, advertisements, lights and the circulation of traffic, the SI developed the spatial

practice known as the *dérive*.² Defined as a “drifting on foot through spaces often defined by reconstruction and modernisation, that would in turn produce alternative patterns of exploration and protest against the alienation of life and forced labour under modern capitalism,”³ the *dérive* is exemplary of a constructed situation—a playful tactic meant to encourage an extraordinary experience of the city. For the SI, walking across the city became a subversive technique that would be used both as a way of assessing the impact of the urban environment on human experiences, and as a means by which to critically intervene within, and reveal the true potential of the constructed urban landscape.

While the SI are generally credited with the concept of the *dérive*, this exploration of the urban environment had developed several years before the formal formation of the group. In 1952 a group called the Lettrist International (LI), made up of Debord, Gil Wolman, Michèle Bernstein, Mohamed Dahou, Jacques Fillion, Gilles Ivain, Serge Berna, Jean-Louis Brau and Ivan Chtcheglov, formed after breaking away from Lettrist founding members Isidore Isou and Gabriel Pomerand.⁴ Moving away from the poetry and language-based interests of the initial Lettrist group, the LI sought “to work on the conscious, collective construction of a new civilization,”⁵ by focusing their interest on “a passionate way of living that

² Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture : the Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992), 57.

³ Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*”, *Les Lèvres Nues*, No. 9, November 1956.
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> (May 22, 2006).

⁴ Situationist International Online, “Chronology: Pre-1957,” Situationist International Online
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/chronology/1956.html> (Accessed Aug 21, 2007), n.p.

⁵ As quoted in Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002), 94.

took the form of adventure in the urban environment.”⁶ *Potlatch*, the internal bulletin of the French LI edited by André Frank Conord, was the main medium for the vocalization and dissemination of their ideas on how this new civilization would be formed. It carried numerous articles on urbanism and the city which argued that “architecture ‘must reach the point of exciting passion’ and converged in a call for a unitary urbanism, a critical study of the city utilizing all artistic and technical resources.”⁷ The group was concerned initially with broadening how architecture was conceived and designed, but more importantly, with expanding the possibilities for how the space and environment around architecture could be used, lived in and revolutionized.

The first essay in which the term *dérive* appeared was “*Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau*,” written in 1953 by 19-year old Ivan Chtcheglov,⁸ in which he describes a new urban plan that would relieve the tedium of the metropolis—“we are bored in the city,”⁹ he announces. After describing his vision for the reorganization of the city, Chtcheglov states that “the main activity of the inhabitants will be CONTINUOUS DRIFTING. The character of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in total disorientation...later, as the gestures inevitably grow stale, this *dérive* will partially leave the realm of direct experience for that of representation...”¹⁰ Rejecting the notion that real life must remain separated from

⁶ Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002), 94.

⁷ Plant, 56-57.

⁸ Careri, 95.

⁹ Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), “Formulaire for a New Urbanism,” *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 1, October 1952, trans. Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Online*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/formulary.html> (Accessed Aug 21, 2006), n.p.

¹⁰ Chtcheglov, n.p.

fantasy and play, Chtcheglov insisted, like the rest of the LI, that reality should be infused with the richness of the imaginary. There should be no such thing as tedium or drudgery in everyday life—one should instead seek superior ways of living, like the *dérive*, that encouraged free play and unobstructed creativity. To further solidify these ideas, Chtcheglov created what he called a *métagraphe*, a map of Paris onto which he collaged images of islands, archipelagos and peninsulas he had taken from a globe. [Figure 1.1] Here, the exotic was not transposed onto the city, but rather, was revealed as always already existing beneath the urban landscape. Resembling a patchwork quilt, the *métagraphe* illustrated that the fantastical was permanently within arm's reach in the city—one simply needed to search it out. The *dérive* would allow one to uncover these whimsical areas, to interweave the everyday and the extraordinary, and ultimately, to reject the cyclical trap of production and consumption. Because it was a fleeting action, an “immediate instant to be experienced in the present moment without considering its representation and conservation in time,”¹¹ the ephemerality of the *dérive* denied its own objectification and commodification. Ultimately, this continuous drifting through the cityscape invigorated everyday life, bringing the LI closer to an alternative way of inhabiting the city, situated both outside of, and in opposition to, the regulations of bourgeois society.

Three years after the publication of Chtcheglov's article, Debord began to theorize a more systematized use of the *dérive*. In September 1955, Debord published “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” in *Les Lèvres nues* #6,

¹¹ Careri, 92.

the first of a series of important Lettrist articles to appear in the Belgian journal. Building upon Chtcheglov's ideas, Debord outlines a further use for the *dérive*: the psychogeographical exploration of the cityscape. "Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."¹² He postulated here that the *dérive* could be considered the primary tool for such investigations; however, it was not until November 1956, in the ninth issue of *Les Lèvres nues* that he delineated the definitive rules of engagement and focus of the *dérive*. In an article titled "Theory of the *Dérive*,"¹³ Debord defines the concept as "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll."¹⁴ During a *dérive*, which one could complete alone, or in a small group—"the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups, of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness"¹⁵—the goal is to allow oneself to drift through the urban environment, guided by its "psychogeographical contours" as a means by which to uncover the hidden potential of the city. "In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work, and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action and

¹² Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," *Les Lèvres Nues*, No.6, Sept 1955, trans. Ken Knabb, [Situationist International Online](http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html), <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html> (Accessed Aug 21, 2006), n.p.

¹³ Published in *Les Lèvres nues*, No.9 (Nov 1956). This is also the article where the word 'situationist' makes its first appearance.

¹⁴ Guy Debord, "Theory of the *dérive*," *Les Lèvres nues*, No.9 (Nov 1956), trans. Ken Knabb, Situationist International Online, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> (Accessed Aug 21, 2006), n.p.

¹⁵ Debord, 1956, n.p.

let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.”¹⁶ Debord further systematizes the walk by asserting, “the average duration of a *dérive* is one day, considered as the time between two periods of sleep...the spatial field of a *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself.”¹⁷ The principle driving the psychogeographic walk is the belief that one’s experience of the city must differ greatly according to the architecture of a space—be it the urban design of the street, the architectural design of buildings or the sounds, textures, colours and lighting within and around them. The *dérive* is thus a means to “read” the psychological impact of the city on an individual’s state of mind. He also began to map these psychogeographical areas, creating diagrams that barely resembled the actual physical arrangement of the city. [Figure 1.2] Taking an aerial view of Paris, he cut the image into sections, leaving only the areas of the city that had had a particular psychogeographical effect on him. These especially emotive districts were then joined by arrows, demonstrating his movements from one to another, tracing the trail of his *dérive* and the ways in which the psychogeography of the city prompted him to move through it. Concerning himself primarily with the discoveries that could be made in the urban landscape, where “the taste for *dériving* tends to promote all sorts of new forms of labyrinths made possible by modern techniques and construction,”¹⁸ Debord’s approach to the *dérive* represents a bridge between

¹⁶ Debord, 1956, n.p.

¹⁷ Debord, 1956, n.p.

¹⁸ Debord, 1956, n.p.

the free-form approach of the Lettrist International to the *dérive*, and the more concrete form that would be solidified later by the Situationist International.

Taking a Walk on the Wild Side

This attempt to meld art and everyday life through an aestheticized use of and interaction with the urban landscape can be traced back to the anti-art actions of the Parisian Dadaists in the 1920s. As Francesco Careri outlines in Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice, it was in 1921 that the Dada group made the first series of *visit-excursions*: organized walks to banal spaces of Paris.¹⁹ These urban ready-mades mark, according to Careri, a passage from “the representation of motion to the construction of an aesthetic action to be effected in the reality of everyday life.”²⁰ In essence, these walks turned away from an attempt to capture human motion in an artistic medium, towards that motion becoming art itself. On April 14, 1921, at three in the afternoon, the Dada group—among them André Breton, Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia—set out on their first excursion to the unpromising, banal location of the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. [Figure 1.3] The group gathered participants for this excursion through the distribution of press releases, flyers and photos. [Figure 1.4] This voyage was meant to be the first of an intended series of adventures to such prosaic sites in Paris.²¹ Purposely seeking out the more prosaic locations of the city, this walk represented, for the Dadaists, “a concrete way of arriving at the total secularization of art and life.”²² Simply put, in

¹⁹ Careri, 21.

²⁰ Careri, 70.

²¹ At this time, further outings were announced to the press such as the Louvre, the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, and the Gare Saint-Lazare.

²² Careri, 73.

championing the banal spaces of the city as those which inspired artistic creativity, the Dadaists hoped to create a union between art and the everyday and erase the borders that separated one from the other. Everyday life would become art, and art would be found in the everyday. The artistic act in this project lies not in the products born from the walk, but in having thought of the action to perform. It was the “first symbolic operation that attributed aesthetic values to a space rather than an object.”²³ The site of the action was just as important as the action itself—the banality of the space traveled to was what made it of interest to the Dadaists—and no subsequent elaboration of the site was necessary.

In May of 1924 these wanderings evolved further to an excursion through the nearby countryside—an event that would mark the transition between the aestheticized walks of the Dadaists and the *déambulations* of the Surrealists. For this trip, Louis Aragon, André Breton, Max Morise and Roger Vitrac organized a train trip to Blois, a small town selected at random on the map. This reliance on chance was at the heart of the *déambulation*, a walk taken without specific destination or aim beyond an openness to the chance encounters one might have with the chosen space. Conceived as a form of automatic drawing in real space—a type of visual creation in which one’s hand was encouraged to move randomly over the drawing surface, freeing the creative process of rational control by allowing the act of mark-making to be driven by chance and accident—the goal of the *déambulation* was to achieve a state of hypnosis by walking, to wander the landscape in a disorienting fashion and to enter into an unconscious interaction

²³ Careri, 75-78.

with the territory. It was an action “capable of revealing the unconscious zones of space, the repressed memories of the city.”²⁴ Through *déambulation* the Surrealists hoped to further investigate the spatial territories of the unconscious, believing that “urban space could be crossed like our mind, that a non-visible reality can reveal itself in the city...a sort of psychological investigation of one’s relationship with urban reality.”²⁵ The purpose the excursions like the one to Blois was to uncover what lay *beyond* the triteness of the city championed by the Dadaists; the Surrealists were not concerned with the merger of art and life so much as discovering the unconscious desires that lay hidden beneath normal, lived experience. They also aimed to map these effected areas; Breton in fact suggested marking enjoyed spaces in white and the avoided spaces in black. The middle spaces, in grey, would represent zones in which sensations of attraction and repulsion alternated.²⁶ This focus on the emotive qualities of a given geographical area would very much effect the development of the Situationist *dérive* and psychogeography.

Rebel Rebel

With the formation of the Situationist International in 1957, as an amalgamation of the Imaginist Bauhaus, London Psychogeographical Society and the Lettrist International, the *dérive* became a much more regimented, concrete form of exploring the cityscape and its psychogeographical formations.²⁷ Centering their concern on the physical urban environment—primarily that of Paris—in which

²⁴ Careri, 22.

²⁵ Careri, 87.

²⁶ Careri, 84-86.

²⁷ Plant, 55.

the everyday is lived, the Situationists desired to become psychogeographers. They intended to “cultivate an awareness of the ways in which everyday life is conditioned and controlled, the ways in which this manipulation can be exposed and subverted and the possibilities for chosen forms of constructed situations in the post-spectacular world.”²⁸ To *dérive* was to be alert to the ways in which certain areas of the metropolis resonate with particular states of mind. It also became a way to discover alternative reasons for moving through the city, beyond what the streets and buildings were originally designed for. Whereas the Dadaists used walking to join everyday life and art, and the Surrealists walked to explore the unconscious festivity at work beneath the banality of the city, the SI used the urban space as a playground. The *dérive* was a game to revitalize everyday life—to find the festive *in* the banal and to counter the oppression of the spectacle.

Debord was very clear, however, to make concrete distinctions between the actions of the Situationist International and those of the movements that had come before them. The “dismal failure” of the Surrealists’ “imbecilities,” according to Debord, arose from their over-reliance on chance and the unconscious. He states in “Theory of the *Dérive*” that “chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.”²⁹ One’s movement in the *dérive* is based on these currents, not on fortuitous experiences. Attacking the “insufficient awareness

²⁸ Plant, 58.

²⁹ Debord, 1956, n.p.

of the limitations of chance, and [the] inevitable reactionary effects” of the Surrealist’s *déambulation*, Debord criticizes their walk to Blois, insisting that “wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there than anywhere else.”³⁰ He goes on to insist, “the primary urban character of the *dérive*, in its element, is the great industrially transformed cities—those centres of possibilities and meanings.”³¹ The investigative object of the *dérive* was real life, and therefore, the real city, rather than the undercurrents of the mind. “Unlike surrealist automatism, the *dérive* was not a matter of surrendering to the dictates of an unconscious mind or irrational force.”³² Instead, the *dérive* would be undertaken according to rules of the game. And yet, to take part in the *dérive* meant deliberately attempting to break those rules and invent one’s own—to free one’s creative potential from the confines of social and cultural restrictions. This free play within the city ultimately served to elude larger systems of social control at work there; the aestheticized walk was meant to bring about a powerful revolutionary change in the way both the city, and society, were organized.

These rebellious energies were directed against what Debord named in 1967 the spectacle—the never-ending torment of advertising, marketing, and media events that pervaded the urban landscape. “It is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”³³ For Debord, the spectacle is not only a substitute for experience, but also the primary means by which capitalism retains, obscures and deflects the nature of its control

³⁰ Debord, 1956, n.p.

³¹ Debord, 1956, n.p.

³² Plant, 59.

³³ Guy Debord, “Thesis #4,” *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12.

by preventing citizens from achieving their full creative potential. To be a citizen within contemporary spectacular culture means, according to Debord, to be highly alienated from any true or real social experiences. As part of a society mediated by images and technology, individuals are often cut off, whether through imposed situations or by choice, from true communal experiences with others. For Debord, alienation was especially prevalent in the modern city. Here, the pervasive effects of media imagery were combined with the conditioning effects of architecture and urban design; shopping malls, sidewalks plastered with ads, and roadways meant only for automobiles all encouraged one to take part in the spectacle through consumption, and consequently, contributed to the manipulation and control of one's creative potential.

In this light, the Situationists were especially critical of Modern architecture and city planning, which was characterized by a highly geometric, rational organization, exemplified by the grid-based urban and architectural designs of Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier (Charles Édouard Jeanneret). Renowned for his now-common 'international style' of simplified, unadorned architecture, Le Corbusier's functionalist aesthetic, which he described as a "machine for living," was viewed by the SI as a highly restrictive form of design that threatened to wipe out any sense of playfulness or spontaneity in the city.³⁴ The SI was critical of buildings such as Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (1946-1952), which to them, further typified and perpetuated the manipulative and controlling nature of modern capitalism and the spectacle over everyday life; as they put it, "the isolated

³⁴ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998), 5.

inhabitant... [therefore sees] their lives reduced to the pure triviality of the repetitive combined with the obligatory absorption of an equally repetitive spectacle.”³⁵

[Figure 1.5] Typical of Le Corbusier’s style, *Unité d’Habitation* is based on a simple geometric grid, divided into cube upon cube of living space. Located in Marseille, the apartment complex, or ‘vertical village’ is the epitome of functionality, a model for collective living that incorporates all aspects of everyday living—shopping, recreation and a nursery—into one single utopistic building.

Regardless of Le Corbusier’s aims, the SI considered the rigidity of Modern architecture dictatorial, because it exercised too much control over everyday activities, forcing citizens into very specific uses of the city space and the buildings within it. The SI set themselves up as a counterpoint to this type of urbanism, developing their own methods, such as the *dérive*, for studying and knowing the city. Meant to maximize the freedom and potential of the individual in the urban landscape, the *dérive* allowed for and encouraged an attentiveness to the unplanned spaces of the city, those not necessarily designed or containing a regimented use put forward by architects or industrial designers. The act of walking was considered a highly creative and playful way of reclaiming the city streets that promoted maximal imagination and expression of the individual within the city. “The city is a toy to be utilized at one’s pleasure...for the experience of alternative behaviours, a place in which to waste useful time so as to transform it into playful-constructive time.”³⁶ By frittering away so-called ‘useful time’—the time in which

³⁵ Guy Debord, as quoted in Sadler, 16.

³⁶ Careri, 108.

citizens of a capitalist society are encouraged to be productive, the SI intended to turn the entire day into 24-hours of pure leisure—a time of free, unmediated interaction with the city. This, along with their subversion of urban space, made the *dérive* a highly rebellious tool, part of the Situationist's larger arsenal meant to deny the rigid, capitalist power structures at work in the metropolis. Through the *dérive*, the SI believed they could ultimately transform the passive city resident into a subject who would be active in bringing about a full societal revolution and, ultimately, aid in the recreation of society outside the alienating system of the spectacle.

The revolutionary spirit of the SI was very much of its time. Believing that the avant-garde would bring about total revolution, its goal of a completely free, unmediated society was a purely utopian vision, spawned out of the general political climate of France in the 1960s.³⁷ And yet, with the failure of the May 1968 revolutions, those, like Michel de Certeau, who witnessed the breakdown of such radical leftist groups, began to theorize more pragmatic, and some might argue more realistic, ways to affect change in daily life. De Certeau's concentration on the poetic ways in which citizens operate within society is a considerably more gentle, attainable way of approaching, understanding and eventually transforming everyday life. His lyrical methodology was thus chosen to compliment that of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato. Nether artist intends to begin, nor further, a specifically political or revolutionary purpose. Like de Certeau, they are concerned

³⁷ For more on this, see Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

with playing *within the gaps of* the power structures the Situationist sought to overthrow. As Borsato herself describes, “instead of competing with everything that is bigger and more extreme in our culture, the impulse is to go inward and small—and to do that thoroughly and with a sense of humour and sensitivity.”³⁸ In the following chapter, the ways in which Borsato and Alÿs’s performances make visible the poetics of everyday life will become all the more apparent.

³⁸ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

Chapter Two

To walk in the city is to engage directly with the built environment. For French sociologist Michel de Certeau, the way a pedestrian weaves through the city is one of many 'ways of operating' in which personal creativity can be infused into everyday life. This chapter opens with an in depth exploration of this process, named by de Certeau as 'making do,' before moving on to theorize the walks of Alÿs and Borsato as artistic representations of this social phenomenon. Throughout this chapter, the visual records that capture each artist's performance will be referred to in descriptive terms only, as a more fruitful, detailed analysis of their documentary practices takes place in Chapter Three. After touching briefly on the gendered implications of these interventions, I introduce an alternative way of theorizing the practice of Alÿs and Borsato through the lesser-known theory of rhythmanalysis, put forth by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre. I argue that it is in fact through their various form of bodily engagement with the space of the city that Borsato and Alÿs are able to draw out alternative ways of knowing the city. I conclude that the performance interventions of these two artists ultimately draw out the poetic moments of creativity that exist in the everyday.

Day Tripper

In his seminal book, The Practices of Everyday Life, de Certeau sets out to elucidate the political potential of everyday actions—cooking, walking and reading—within a capitalist society by building on Michel Foucault's approach to the study of power relationships in Discipline and Punishment (1975). De Certeau acknowledges the importance of Foucault's approach, which analyzes the "microphysics of power,"¹ yet wishes to move beyond Foucault's theories that ultimately privilege the "the productive apparatus."² For de Certeau,

if...the grid of "discipline" is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally what "ways of operating" form the counterpart, on the consumer's (or "dominee's"?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.³

His concern is not to dissect existing systems of power, that is to understand how the relationships of power work in society, but rather to understand the anti-disciplines that occur as daily forms of resistance *within* those relationships, "the silent and unacknowledged forms of resistance that 'break though the grid of the established order and accepted disciplines'."⁴ De Certeau's primary focus in this book is the Western capitalist model of society, and the power dynamic that exists between 'producers' and 'consumers' in the broadest sense. In the case of walking, an architect would be considered the 'producer', while the walker is the

¹ de Certeau, xiv.

² de Certeau, xiv.

³ de Certeau, xiv.

⁴ Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2000), 168.

'consumer.' Ultimately, the balance of power in this system rests with those who are able to produce, however, the way that consumers choose to use these products is of interest to de Certeau. He does not call for a radical, revolutionary (and arguably unachievable) overthrowing of the system, but rather, seeks to understand how it is appropriated by the consumer and attributed meaning in daily life. The social experience de Certeau seeks to elucidate in this text is the manner in which individuals make use of the 'products' of power in their everyday life, the less visible and non-confrontational ways they recycle, reinvent and reinterpret the apparatuses of power.

In his chapter titled "Walking in the City," De Certeau describes walking as a method of reinterpreting the structure of the city that is akin to the enunciative act in speech. "Speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation, or re-appropriation, of language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with the other (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations."⁵ In this way, walking in the city becomes a highly charged action, a way for the "ordinary practitioner of they city"⁶ to come to both know, and in his view, speak back to the urban landscape. As de Certeau describes, the pedestrian speech act...

...has a triple "enunciative" function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies relations among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic "contracts" in the form of movements (just as

⁵ de Certeau, xiii.

⁶ de Certeau, 93.

verbal enunciation is an “allocation,” “posits another opposite” the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action)⁷

In this sense, the personal act of walking becomes highly political. For de Certeau, walking is “a space of enunciation.”⁸ If one is to think of the city as an interlocutor, that is, the walker’s partner in urban conversation, “the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language.”⁹ The walker is able to use urban space, and all that exists within it, the same way a speaker uses language—using their feet to form steps, and steps to create a path or route, just as in speech sounds are used to form words, that are then strung together into sentences.

According to de Certeau, walking, like speech, is confined to a grammatical system, that is, the physical reality of the built environment; however, just as speech is altered through slang and colloquialisms, so too can walking manipulate urban spaces. “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be...it can take place only within them...it does not receive its identity from them.”¹⁰ For de Certeau, “the geometrical space of urbanists and architects seems to have the status of the “proper meaning” constructed by grammarians and linguists in order to have a normal and normative level to which they can compare the drifting of “figurative” language.”¹¹ That being said however, he notes that “in reality, this faceless “proper” meaning...cannot be found in current

⁷ de Certeau, 98.

⁸ de Certeau, 98.

⁹ de Certeau, 98.

¹⁰ de Certeau, 101.

¹¹ de Certeau, 100.

use, whether verbal or pedestrian...”¹² Whereas the intended or ‘proper’ use of urban design, arrived at by designers can be equated with ‘proper’ grammar in speech, de Certeau recognizes that, in speech, as in walking, a perfect use of such grammar is often not put to use, or adhered to. The way a pedestrian moves through the city, the routes she chooses to take or not to take, allows for a personal utilization of the city space—something that is not necessarily directed by the ‘proper’ grammar of its urban and architectural design. This improvisational use of the city—deciding to go only here and not there, creating shortcuts and detours, or forbidding oneself to take obligatory routes—is according to de Certeau, a type of ‘making do’ that allows the walker to adapt the apparatuses of power in the city to her own interests and rules.¹³ It is within these more subtle moments of creativity that the poetics of everyday life are evidenced.

Making do may be understood as a variation of the act of *bricolage*. First applied by Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropological theory, the French verb *bricoler* has no direct English translation, but can be considered in line with notions of “do-it-yourself” culture, essentially meaning “to tinker” or “to fiddle.” One who takes part in the act of *bricolage* is known as a *bricoleur*—a highly creative and resourceful person who is able to create objects or situations out of existing materials. The key to this creative process is that the *bricoleur* is able to collect information, objects and things around them, and recombine them in ways that they were not originally designed for. “The rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at

¹² de Certeau, 100.

¹³ de Certeau, xiii-xiv.

hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous."¹⁴ By making creative use of the materials already available to him or her, the *bricoleur* is able to reinterpret, reinvent and reuse what is available within various everyday systems, and make it his or her own.

While the idea of *bricolage* is a useful metaphor for understanding de Certeau's concept of making do, it is certainly not analogous. *Bricolage* carries with it very mechanical connotations and is meant very much to signify the physical creation of one new object out of the parts of many old ones. The *bricoleur* takes care to exercise a certain amount of control over the objects he or she chooses to use in their creation, rummaging through a pile of scraps to pick out the trinkets that best suit his or her task. One who is making do differs from the *bricoleur* in that he or she does not create a physical object, nor do they necessarily have the choice of what products they are able to use. Making do, especially in the case of walking, is more about a creative reuse of a space or a text—less about creating a tangible object and more so a way of living one's life. In the act of making do, one

insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body...a different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place....this mutation makes the text habitable...it transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient.¹⁵

De Certeau likens the act of renting an apartment to that of making do, where various people, at various times, each inhabit the same space, yet, none make use

¹⁴ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 19.

¹⁵ de Certeau, xxi

of it in the same way. "Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories...as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals."¹⁶ Through this process of 'making do' the walker "creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place of the language; without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation."¹⁷ Recognizing that many oppressive and domineering systems are continuously at work within the everyday, de Certeau asserts, nevertheless, that they cannot contain the spontaneous and imaginative energies of individuals; it is the way in which the pedestrian appropriates the structure of the city that is therefore of utmost interest to de Certeau, rather than a complete revolution of the structure itself. These personal acts of creative poaching, clandestine moments of re-usage, ultimately represent for de Certeau, "the ingenious ways in which the weak makes use of the strong, thus lend[ing] a political dimension to everyday practices."¹⁸ It is in these moments that the poetics of everyday life are best brought to light.

The concept of 'making-do' is present in many of Francis Alÿs's early interventions. Treating the city as interlocutor, Alÿs exploits its residual spaces as a means of entering in direct dialogue with the city, rather than passively consuming it. In *The Leak*, performed both in Ghent and in Sao Paulo in 1995, Alÿs spent an

¹⁶ de Certeau, xxi.

¹⁷ de Certeau, 30.

¹⁸ de Certeau, xvii

afternoon wandering through each city with a punctured can of paint that dripped a Jackson Pollock-esque trail behind him, tracing his path through the streets. "Having left the gallery, I wander through the neighbourhoods carrying a leaking can of paint. My dripping action ends when, having found my way back to the gallery, thanks to my previous paint marks, I hang the empty can on the wall of the exhibition space."¹⁹ [Figure 2.1] The street is literally appropriated as the artist's canvas—his personal path through the streets staining its asphalt and cobblestone. Alÿs's actions here defy the notion that a work of art must be a defined, tangible object—his refusal to paint on a traditional medium like canvas clearly presents a challenge to the salability and marketability of his artwork. At the same time, in his direct interaction with the street, he enacts de Certeau's notion of making do. Turning the asphalt into his canvas, he behaves not unlike a graffiti artist, reclaiming the space of the city as a space of creative action and festivity. His paint drops "tag" the street, claiming, "I was here." By tracing his path through the streets, his actions not only visualize his own personal use of the city, they also serve to articulate the often obscured ways in which all pedestrians move through urban space, pronouncing and bringing forward the poetics of the everyday.

In *The Thread (Loser/Winner)* performed in 1998, in Stockholm, Alÿs set out to map his own route between the Museum of Science and Technology and the Nordic Museum. Instead of paint, Alÿs allowed the sleeve of his vibrant blue sweater to catch at one site, and unravel as he wound his way through the parks

¹⁹ Francis Alÿs, "Postcard for *The Leak*," reprinted in *The Hugo Boss Prize 2002 : Francis Alÿs, Olafur Eliasson, Hachiya Kazuhiko, Pierre Huyghe, Koo Jeong-a, Anri Sala* (New York, N.Y.: Guggenheim Museum, 2002), 25.

that lie between the museums, again creating a version of Hansel and Gretel's bread crumb trail, linking the historical museum with the contemporary. [Figure 2.2] Directly linked to his body, the remnants of his sweater inscribe the streets with the memory of his walk in the urban space. These ephemeral actions allow the artist to map his own individual use of the city onto the landscape, in a sense talking back to it, responding to its regulated streets, footpaths and parks. As in *The Leak*, the trail left by Alÿs illustrates his own personalized interaction with the city—standing as an illustration of the way in which Alÿs has chosen to make do with the spaces allotted to him, rather than necessarily conforming to them. In both works, Alÿs's actions contradict the way in which the city has the tendency to erase the individual's personal use of the city. His path becomes a visual marker of the way in which movement through the city becomes a highly personalized action. When left to their own creative devices, each citizen moves through the urban environment at their own pace, appropriating the grammar of the street to create their own poem of movement.

Diane Borsato's performances represent an alternative way in which the poetics of everyday life are articulated through interventions in the city. Like Alÿs, she too attempts to create a direct physical interaction to the city, yet it is based more on clandestine movements that articulate moments of human interaction within the urban environment. Not always based on the walk proper, that is, movement on foot, yet always based on a broader sense of bodily movement, her actions in the city are "more about dance...about choreography—in a modern

sense—and about the meaningfulness of gesture.”²⁰ Performative interventions are a way for her to enact this gesture, and walking is often a starting point for her interactions with the city space. As she describes, “the defining attribute of performance is gesture—not live-ness really...while that means sometimes moving...it also means being moved or moving or touching in non-literal ways.”²¹ The sensual experience of the city for Borsato is a way of actualizing an “alternative relationship to the space of the city, of moving through the city in different way, using intimacy as a way of knowing.”²² For Borsato, it is finding this intimacy within the city that constitutes her own way of making do. At the same time, her performances, like those of Alÿs, continue to act as a means of articulating those unarticulatable poetics in the everyday.

Borsato conceives of knowing the city through intimate interactions with its citizens. This search for sensuality in the city space thus affects the manner in which she moves through the urban landscape. In *Touching 1000 People*, first performed in 2000 in Montréal, Borsato set as her objective the task of walking through the urban space with the intention of coming in direct contact with one thousand different people over the course of one month. Throughout her daily activities—running errands, shopping, traveling from one location to another—Borsato deliberately altered her habit of walking through the urban space, in order to achieve this goal. [Figure 2.3] As we see in the photographs documenting this performance, she discreetly outstretched her arm as she passed each pedestrian,

²⁰ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

²¹ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

²² Diane Borsato, *Artist's Talk*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, ON, October 28, 2006.

grazing their arm or shoulder with her hand. Whereas the “experience of urban space is [often] reduced to that of the modern museum, where constraints on the bodies of visitors create a kind of “organized walking” in which route, speed, gestures, speaking and sound are all controlled,”²³ Borsato did not allow the architecture or the urban design of the street to dictate her path—instead, she based her entire walk on the actions of her fellow pedestrians. She deliberately went out of her way to brush against them, touching them lightly on the shoulder or arm or bumping into them in a busy crowd. The movement of others thus determined her path—a patchwork route sewn together by the street traffic around her.

Borsato was originally inspired by the idea that direct human contact can in fact improve one’s quality of life. “I read a study which suggested that when people are touched deliberately or even unconsciously tapped, it seems to subtly affect their behaviour and well-being.”²⁴ Yet, her most interesting description of the piece tells of the work as one that describes a place. “Through projects like *Touching 1000 People*, I really get a picture of the city. It is like a way for me to ‘draw’ the city, to know the city through touching.”²⁵ This idea of sensually knowing the city seems to counteract the colder, alienating effects of the city as described by writers such as Georg Simmel;²⁶ Borsato instead embraces possibilities for social interaction

²³ Iain Borden, “Another Pavement, Another Beach: Skateboarding and the Performative Critique of Architecture,” Iain Borden, Joe Kerr and Jane Rendell eds. *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 184.

²⁴ Diane Borsato “Touching 1000 People” [Diane Borsato Online http://www.dianeborsato.net/touch.html](http://www.dianeborsato.net/touch.html), (Accessed Feb 6, 2007), n.p.

²⁵ Borsato, SAW Gallery, October 28, 2006.

²⁶ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 132-137.

and alternative relationships that could only be spawned in the bustling crowds of the metropolitan environment. She takes the potentially alienating space of the city and recreates it as a space of intense human interaction. The city, for Borsato, is not a place of fear or a place to avoid, but rather a space of constant conflux and change, of possibility and interest. Regarding the city as “an oeuvre, as the production of human beings and the richly significant play of collective creation as well as the place of love, desire, turmoil, and uncertainty,”²⁷ her performance here is just as much about the nature of human experience in the urban realm—hers, and also her fellow pedestrians—as it is about articulating her personal use of the city.

Walk Like a Man?

By virtue of the nature of their artistic practices, both Alÿs and Borsato have been compared, in various forms, to the Situationist on a *dérive* diverting the alienation of the capitalist city, but also, to the actions of the *flâneur*, a detached pedestrian observer of the modern metropolis.²⁸ The term *flâneur* is derived from the French *flâner*, which means “to stroll.” In its simplest definition, a *flâneur* is a person who uses walking to experience their environment. And yet, the term carries with it loaded, gendered connotations, and as such, a brief detour will be taken here to differentiate the work of Alÿs and Borsato from the actions of the *flâneur*.

Flâneurie was initially used by French writer Charles Baudelaire in the mid-1800s, to describe a specific person’s relationship to the modern city. For Baudelaire, the *flâneur* was a gentleman stroller of city streets who played a large

²⁷ Borden, 194.

²⁸ See James Trainor “Walking the Walk: The artist as Flâneur” *Border Crossings*, Vol. 22, pt 4 (Nov 2003): 82-92 and Kathleen Ritter, “Flâneuse. *Vue du trottoir*,” *Esse arts + opinions*, *Dérives II*, 2005.

roll in the theoretical and physical understanding of the modern metropolis in the late 19th and early 20th century. The industrial revolution had caused significant social, economic and physical changes in urban centres, altering both the space of the city and its citizen's relationship to it. The metropolis was expanding, and so too were the writings on how to negotiate this modern life. For Baudelaire, the strolling actions of the *flâneur* epitomized these new ways of interacting with urban space—likened to a poet, the *flâneur* was a bourgeois man who spent his afternoons walking in a detached manner, aloofly through the city. As Baudelaire wrote in 1863,

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement...to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home, to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.²⁹

Afforded to him by his social status, the *flâneur* had a significant amount of leisure time, which he could spend in the streets, culling from them experiences that would help him better understand the modern metropolis. The *flâneur* was an observer of the crowd, a wanderer of the boulevards, and for Baudelaire, a hero of modern life. Nearly sixty-five years later, social theorist Walter Benjamin adapted Baudelaire's *flâneur*, applying the concept of the urban observer as a tool for analyzing his generation's relationship to the city. From a Marxist standpoint, Benjamin saw the *flâneur* as an uninvolved yet highly perceptive bourgeois

²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Jonathan Mayne, trans and ed. (London: Phaidon, 1964), 9.

dilettante who set out to observe and investigate the wilds of the urban jungle. “The physiologies were the first booty taken from the marketplace by the *flâneur*—who, so to speak, went botanizing on the asphalt.”³⁰ Benjamin’s *flâneur* did not interact with others in the street—rather, he was an observer, a loner, taking stock of the world around him, in search of a deeper meaning to the city.

While visionary, it is precisely these romanticized visions of the male walker in the city that have caused contemporary theorists to find faults with the conceptualization of the *flâneur*. Graeme Gilloch has described the *flâneur* as an “aimless, complacent, haughty bourgeois who wanders through the urban complex in search of nothing more than diversion, to see and to be seen.”³¹ Similarly, critiques have also been leveled against the *flâneur* and his proponents for promoting a specifically bourgeois, specifically male experience of the modern city. As Janet Wolff writes, “these heroes of modernity thus share the possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary uprooting, or anonymous arrival at a new place. They are, of course, all men.”³² Attempting to undo the reification of the *flâneur*, Wolff charges that it was because of his gender that the *flâneur* was able to wander unbothered through the city, on his walks of observatory pleasure. She writes that “the public sphere, then, despite the presence of some women in certain contained areas, was a masculine domain and insofar as the experience of ‘the modern’

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), J 82a,3, 372

³¹ Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and the Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (New York: Polity Press, 1988), 152.

³² Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (New York: Polity Press, 1990), 39.

occurred mainly in the public sphere, it was primarily men's experience."³³ A woman walking alone, at this time, would have been seen as highly dubious—as Wolff points out, the only women in Baudelaire's essays on the city were the prostitute, widow, old lady, lesbian, murder victim and the passing unknown women.³⁴ None of these types of women were necessarily considered to be heroic; on the contrary, Wolff argues that in fact, females in the public space of the city were only seen as objects to be consumed—subjects of the *flâneur's* gaze, "objects of his 'botanizing'."³⁵ Wolff's project here is to both illuminate the gendered limitations of the *flâneur*, and to challenge the idea that the *flâneuse*, a female equivalent, could have existed at that time.

And yet, to transport the *flâneur*—the issues he represents, as well as the connotations he brings with him—into the space of today's cities, is to confuse the contemporary urban context with that of the late 19th and early 20th century. The city in the era that the *flâneur* was originally theorized was certainly one of gendered and class-based divisions, however; these social barriers are not nearly as prevalent, nor would I argue in the case of gender as relevant, neither in today's metropolis nor in the interventions of Borsato and Alÿs. While I recognize that each artist is biologically of a different sex, this fact does not alter the opportunities they *each* have to interact with the city. To assume that only Alÿs can be a *flâneur* because he is male or to assert that Borsato is limited in her interventions in the "male" public space is to perpetuate differences and distinctions that, quite plainly,

³³ Wolff, 35.

³⁴ Wolff, 41.

³⁵ Wolff, 42.

do not need to be made. Certainly, it is important to recognize the historical precedents that exist for this type of performance. It is ultimately more important, however, to analyse Alÿs and Borsato's work within *their* specific historical framework. Although they do belong to a lineage of walkers, Alÿs and Borsato "belong to *their* era and moment. They are dissonant echoes of the *current* situation of the artist..."³⁶ It is therefore, on this current historical moment that this thesis will focus.

So Many Things You Can Add to Your Collection

While the notion of making do is articulated in the work of Borsato and Alÿs in the different ways in which they visualize the creativity inherent in an individual's use of the city, it also plays itself out in the way each artist literally takes from the street, remaking new objects and scenarios. In one of Alÿs's better-known works, *El Colector* (1991-92) Alÿs walked around Mexico City, pulling behind him a rectangular magnet on wheels, which was attached to a leash. "For an indeterminate period of time, the magnetized collector takes a daily walk through the streets and gradually builds up a coat made of any metallic residue lying in its path. This process goes on until the collector is completely covered by its trophies."³⁷ [Figure 2.4] The 'collector' resembled a child's toy or a poorly made mechanical dog on a leash—albeit an unwilling dog that had to be coaxed along on his morning walk. Here Alÿs's walk concentrates not necessarily on the way in which one moves through the space of the city, but rather, on the commotion one

³⁶ Michele Thériault, "The Art of Balancing on a Tightrope," *The Last Clown* (Montreal: Galerie de l'UQAM, 2000), 26. My emphasis.

³⁷ Francis Alÿs, *Postcard for El Colector*, reprinted in *The Hugo Boss Prize 2002 : Francis Alys, Olafur Eliasson, Hachiya Kazuhiko, Pierre Huyghe, Koo Jeong-a, Anri Sala* (New York, N.Y.: Guggenheim Museum, 2002), 26.

experiences in these movements. Whereas Borsato acts as a collector in *Touching 1000 People*, amassing an archive of her interactions with others as she moves through the city through the photo-documents that record her performance, Alÿs here seeks to accumulate the opposite—the insignificant, unknown and unusual. Alÿs sets out to collect the waste of the city, the mementos of everyday life, making do with the trinkets he finds there. Each artist, however, relies almost entirely on chance encounters in the city—neither can prepare in advance for the objects or people they will come across in the street. For Alÿs, the final appearance of the collector is entirely dependant on the detritus of the street, rather than his own hand or artistic vision. Acting as the primary documentation of this performance, the collector is exhibited prominently alongside Alÿs' other visual records of this performance. Punning on the notion of travel, and the souvenirs one is supposed to collect on trips to foreign cities, this work concomitantly plays with the idea of Alÿs as both a resident, yet still a tourist, within Mexico City. "It's like being a double agent...I have one foot in European culture, and one foot out. Maybe I enjoy having a double reading, having both an insider and outsider point of view."³⁸ His actions recall both *The Thread* and *The Leak* in their intervention in the cityscape as "a conversation piece and curiosity, while simultaneously culling something from the city."³⁹ His creative production is thus driven by the objects he finds in the street, which are culled together and made new on his collector.

³⁸ Francis Alÿs and James Lingwood, "Rumours," *Seven Walks: London 2004-5* (London: Artangel, 2005), 42.

³⁹ Nico Israel, "Footnotes: On Francis Alÿs," *The Hugo Boss Prize 2002 : Francis Alys, Olafur Eliasson, Hachiya Kazuhiko, Pierre Huyghe, Koo Jeong-a, Anri Sala* (New York, N.Y.: Guggenheim Museum, 2002), 24.

Metaphorically, the act of collecting the refuse of the everyday should be considered as an articulation of the poetics of everyday life that de Certeau sought to elucidate through his writing. By seeing a value in those objects that have been tossed into the street, Alÿs creates an archive of the mundane, just the way that de Certeau attempts to do in his book—by writing about, shedding light on and ultimately finding moments of creativity in the otherwise trivial elements of the everyday. Alÿs, like de Certeau, asserts that this type of peripheral vision is much more about allowing for a different point of view, than declaring a militant discourse on the city. In describing this work, he directly echoes de Certeau's language:

It's a poetic approach if you will...maybe it will have a social dimension or become a political comment, but that has to happen within the experience of the poetic act, when the poetics provoke a sudden loss of self that allow a distancing from the immediate situation, a different perspective on things, and might then have the potential to open up a political thought.⁴⁰

The poetics of a situation are thus of much greater importance to Alÿs than an actual dismantling of the regulatory systems of the city. His works read more as a bringing to light of that which generally goes unnoticed, a gentle reminder of the unnoticed spaces of the everyday, rather than suggesting ways to completely overcome the systems of power at work within the city. For Alÿs, the city is a site of confluence and possibility, rather than something that needs to be escaped.

Borsato's performance *How Easy it would be to be Garbage* (2002) acts as an interesting foil to Alÿs's earlier projects like *The Leak* and *El Colector*. In this intervention, Borsato set out to explore what it would feel like to literally be garbage

⁴⁰ Alÿs and Lingwood, 56.

within the urban space of Montreal. Borsato physically inserted herself into an area of the street by a telephone poll where the city's merchants had disposed of their weekly trash—several black plastic garbage bags and cardboard boxes filled with the detritus of consumer culture lined the sidewalks awaiting pick up. Here, she decided to don her own garbage bag and sit amongst the pile of rubbish. With only her head exposed, wrapped in the red hood of her sweater, she sat with the black bag tied up to her neck. [Figure 2.5] She describes her motivation for this piece: “I was recovering from surgery and feeling terribly material, and ephemeral. I experimented with garbage bags to see how easily I might fit into one. Could I just be thrown away like anything else?”⁴¹ Here, there is an interesting interplay of conceptual impulses that seem to fall directing in between those present in *The Leak* and *El Colector*. Similar to *The Leak*, this performance is very much about Borsato's ability to assert her own individual physical presence in the city. Yet, whereas *The Leak* (and also *The Thread (Loser/Winner)*) is about a positive assertion of the individual's presence in the city, Borsato's sedentary position articulates the negative consequences that occur when an individual's presence is ultimately ignored. Interestingly, whereas Alÿs decided to collect the detritus of society as a way of drawing out and illuminating the insignificant objects of everyday life, Borsato literally becomes that detritus herself. Here her interaction with the everyday spaces of the city—the neglected spaces reserved for trash and objects to be disposed of—becomes not only a way for her to engage directly with

⁴¹ Diane Borsato, “How Easy it would be to be Garbage,” *Diane Borsato Online*, <http://www.dianeborsato.net/garbage.html> (Accessed March 17, 2007), n.p.

the city space, but also a way of employing these underused or overlooked spaces as a metaphor for human relationships and interactions in the city itself.

The Rhythm of the Street

It is tempting to think about how the performance interventions of Alÿs and Borsato, in their various forms, might function to undo the built environment. This deconstructive motivation was certainly at the heart of other walkers' work, especially that of the Situationists. While I argue that each of their works contain a highly subversive component, I stress that the goal of neither performer is to completely demolish the city as a whole. In drawing out the poetics of the everyday at work in urban space, they each present a resistance to the dominant power structures of the city; however, it is not necessarily out of blatant hostility. Keeping in mind de Certeau's notions of making do, one could theorize this resistance in his terms as well. As Ben Highmore points out in Everyday Life and Cultural Theory, "resistance in de Certeau is closer to the use of the term in electronics and psychoanalysis: it is what hinders and dissipates the energy flow of domination, it is what resists representation."⁴² In this light, I wish to continue to theorize the performative interventions of Alÿs and Borsato as alternative ways of 'knowing' the city, as presenting different sensorial and temporal experiences of urban space, akin to what French theorist Henri Lefebvre describes as rhythmanalysis. It is in this way that the resistance present in both artists' work is able to come to the fore.

In his text Elements of Rhythmanalysis, published posthumously in 1992, Lefebvre proposes the study of the various rhythms that are active in daily life, from

⁴² Highmore, 151-152.

the blood flow and the nervous system to the circulatory rhythms of international capital, as a way of theorizing the quotidien.⁴³ Rhythms, according to Lefebvre, are present throughout everyday life, everywhere that there is an interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy; every rhythm implies a relation of a time with a space, and the people who occupy those times and spaces.⁴⁴ It is through rhythmanalysis—the study of biological, psychological and social rhythms—that such relationships are revealed. For Lefebvre, these rhythms “reveal and hide, being much more varied than in music or the so-called civil code of successions, relatively simple texts in relation to the city. Rhythms [are] music of the city, a picture which listens to itself.”⁴⁵ While Lefebvre’s Marxist tendencies are still fairly apparent in this text, it is also productive to consider the multiplicity of such rhythms at work within the everyday as a sort of poetic resistance—that which hinders the flow of domination—to the regimented, measured structures at work within the space of the city.

As though directly describing Alÿs’s own artistic practice within the city, Lefebvre writes that in order to grasp and analyze rhythms, “it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely... A certain exteriority enables the analytic intellect to function. However, to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it: one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration.”⁴⁶ Exploiting this notion of duration, in *Paradox of Praxis* (*sometimes doing something*

⁴³ Ben Highmore, “Introduction to Work and Leisure in Everyday Life,” *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 225-226.

⁴⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 15.

⁴⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Cambridge Mass, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 227.

⁴⁶ Alÿs and Lingwood, 43.

leads to nothing), (1997) Alÿs left his studio in Mexico City at 9:15 in the morning, pushing a large block of ice. Struggling at first to move the ice through the streets, his task becomes easier as the ice began to warm and melt. Chronicling his actions through video and photo documentation, Alÿs continued to move the ice through the streets, pushing, and then kicking it until at 6:47 in the evening, it was nothing more than a puddle of water. [Figure 2.6] Here, Alÿs is “not just drifting through and analysing the environment but actively constructing—*en route*—a fable about the possible ways of interacting with it.”⁴⁷ Alÿs’s intervention enacts two very subtle forms of resistance. The paradox inherent in the work, as referred to in the title, is that his artistic action does not lead to the creation of a final product—on the contrary, in this work he performs specifically to dissolve the object with which he begins. Again playing with art historical references—both Minimalist works of art in their simplistic, refined geometric formations, and also punning on the idea that the gallery space itself is known as a ‘white cube,’ Alÿs resists the institutionalized forces of the art market. Paradoxically, he points to the futility of his own practice: sometimes doing something leads to nothing.

And yet, as Michèle Thériault points out, “the commonplace can also contain artistic gesture.”⁴⁸ In this case, the banality in this work exaggerates the temporal rhythm of the city—physical time slows the way it does in all tedious activities, as one is witness to the sluggish and drawn-out real time thawing and disappearance of the cube of ice. Yet, an acute awareness of the time and space of the streets is

⁴⁷ Jörg Heiser, “Walk on the Wild Side,” *Frieze Online*. http://www.frieze.com/feature_single.asp?f=850 (Accessed Jan. 17, 2007), n.p.

⁴⁸ Thériault, 27.

also revealed—one becomes alert to how the other occupants of the city around Alÿs use its space, how the cyclical rhythms of the sun change the appearance of the street, and wreak havoc on the ice, while the sound of the cube on the ground vocalizes its texture and roughness. Time is visualized through the melting block and exaggerated through Alÿs's own body, as he forces himself to continue with the intervention until the ice has completely dissolved. In this act of creating nothing, Alÿs in fact reveals the very subtle rhythms at work in the city that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Social and architectural theorist Iain Borden describes the same skill in relation to skateboarders. The manner in which skateboarders appropriate the built environment for the purposes of their sport is, for Borden, both a subversion of the authority of architecture, but also, an alternative way of speaking, or knowing, the city. Applying Lefebvre's notion of rhythmanalysis to the skateboarder, Borden explains "micro experience is also part of rhythmanalysis—the relation of the self to the city's physical minutiae that are not always obvious to, or considered by, the dominant visualization of the city on which we most commonly depend."⁴⁹ For Borden, "micro rhythmanalysis involves a sense of touch, generated either from direct contact with the terrain—a hand on building, foot on wall—or from the smoothness and textural rhythms of the surface underneath [the foot that]...create[s] a textual pattern bound in the...experience of urban space."⁵⁰ The countercultural nature of skateboarding, while it does operate on a more

⁴⁹ Borden, 190.

⁵⁰ Borden, 190-191.

oppositional or confrontational form of resistance to the architectural space of the city, nevertheless is very useful for understanding how Alÿs and Borsato's work relates to rhythm analysis. Borden suggests that it is through skateboarding that the rider is able to, "rather than reading or writing the city, speak the city through utterance as bodily engagement."⁵¹ I would argue that it is through their own bodily engagement with the city, that Borsato and Alÿs are able to do the same.

Alÿs's performances, like those of the skateboarder, reveal the micro-rhythms of the city. *Railings* (2004-2005), a segment of Alÿs's more elaborate intervention *Seven Walks* of the same year, is a project that allowed him to explore the "rhythmic possibilities afforded by a characteristic feature of Regency London, its railings."⁵² For Alÿs, railings along the streets of London "are an omnipresent architectural device, more so than in other cities...They speak of a certain period in the city, maybe the Empire days, of a certain status in the world..."⁵³ For this particular intervention, Alÿs was videotaped walking through five areas of London, dragging a stick across the railings he passes. As described by Hugh Pearlman,

[The] film shows him rattling a stick along the railings and porticoes of architect John Nash's Park Crescent. He does it seemingly casually, puffing a cigarette as he goes...but actually keeping to a strict tempo. Then the film cuts to Onslow Gardens in Chelsea...where his stick-rattling becomes an accomplished, syncopated percussion piece."⁵⁴
[Figure 2.7]

⁵¹ Borden, 195.

⁵² Artangel, *Francis Alÿs Seven Walks*, Artangel.org http://www.artangel.org.uk/pages/past/05/05_alys.htm (Accessed February 2, 2007), n.p.

⁵³ Alÿs and Lingwood, 16.

⁵⁴ Hugh Pearlman, "The Soldier and the Fox: Francis Alÿs gets the Measure of London," *Gabion: Retained Writing on Architecture*, <http://www.hughpearman.com/articles5/alys.html> (Accessed Feb 2, 2007), n.p.

Drawing on past motifs in his own work, including similar interventions in Mexico City, where he dragged a stick across the metal shutters of shops in the old centre of the city, Alÿs describes *Railings* as “a natural expansion of a past obsession, plus the coincidence with my ongoing investigation around rhythmic possibilities...”⁵⁵ In Mexico City, the shutters “require[ed] more of a vertical movement of the stick, so it [did not] combine so well with the horizontal motion of the walker.”⁵⁶ In London, the intervention developed from the simple act of the artist dragging his stick along a railing as a way of “feeling the architecture, with the drumstick acting as a kind of catalyst...a way of making contact, of connecting to the physicality of the place...”⁵⁷ to a more complicated drumming action. After initially playing the railings in a more improvisational fashion, Alÿs set out to arrange his performance by systematically determining and noting what sounds each railing made when struck. He methodically mapped the tone each individual rung made on a hand-drawn, vertical musical staff that resembled a guitar tablature. [Figure 2.7 cont.] Once his notation was complete, he attempted to actually play the railings as one might play a guitar, piano or harp, striking specific rungs so they would resonate as specific notes, in time to a melody he sung to himself.

When asked how he had decided on the site of these interventions, Alÿs notes that “there were two requisites, they had to be representative of that social barrier...but they also had to have an acoustic quality. The railing functions as an instrument...By just walking and running a stick against it, the details of the

⁵⁵ Alÿs and Lingwood, 16.

⁵⁶ Alÿs and Lingwood, 20.

⁵⁷ Alÿs and Lingwood, 22.

architecture automatically generate a sound pattern... it was just about listening to the music of the city."⁵⁸ By turning the railings into musical instruments, Alÿs not only acts as a rhythm analyst, "[keeping] his ears open...not only hear words, speeches, noises and sounds for he is able to listen to a house, a street, a city, as one listens to a symphony or an opera,"⁵⁹ he also enacts de Certeau's concepts of resistance and making do. Through his appropriation of the railings, he makes do with the objects at hand to create his own musical interpretation of the city. By turning the railings—objects that represent physical borders of class and status in the city of London—into a playful instrument, he resists the power structures they symbolize. Unable to physically remove or destroy the supremacy of the railings, he is nevertheless able to speak back to the power structure they represent and subvert their restrictiveness and authority.

Such resistance is also very much present in Borsato's performance interventions. *Rolling on the Lawn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture* (1999-2000) is an explicit attempt to move through the city in a different way, to defy normative uses of the city space, and can also be theorized in light of Lefebvre's notion of rhythm analysis. As she describes in the text accompanying the photo-documentation of this work:

I was living near the Canadian Centre for Architecture and walked by it everyday. I was trying to think of new ways to engage myself with the city, and coming home from work one fall afternoon, I decided to roll across the entire length of the famous green lawn—instead of just

⁵⁸ Alÿs and Lingwood, 20-22.

⁵⁹ Lefebvre, 1996, 220.

walking by...I repeated the action in every season for the following year.⁶⁰

The photographs that stand as documentation of this performance show exactly this: Borsato, dressed appropriately for the weather—in a sun-dress in the summer, and boots, mittens and a hooded jacket in the winter—rolling playfully across the grass, her arms and feet outstretched and flailing in mid-motion. [Figure 2.8]

Her full-body interaction with the lawn, the space in between the architectural museum and the neighbouring buildings, is not unlike the movement of Iain Borden's skateboarder, or Lefebvre's rhythm analyst. Through her rolling actions, Borsato's entire body comes in direct contact with this interstitial area, in what she calls a "meditation on our relationship to space—I was trying to think of new ways to engage myself with the city, and work in a space between art and life."⁶¹ By rolling through the grass, she maximizes the surface area of her body that comes into direct contact with the city itself. Like the rhythm analyst, Borsato "thinks with [her] body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality."⁶² Lefebvre's insistence that the rhythm analyst must understand the rhythms of the city through their own body, "arriving at the concrete through experience,"⁶³ directly parallels the essential concept behind performance art, as a work wherein the artist's body becomes the main medium. Borsato's body here becomes the channel, literally and figuratively,

⁶⁰ Diane Borsato, "Rolling on the Lawn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture" [Diane Borsato Online](http://www.dianebersato.net/cca.html) <http://www.dianebersato.net/cca.html>, (Accessed Feb 6, 2007), n.p.

⁶¹ Diane Borsato, *Artist's Talk*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, ON, October 28, 2006.

⁶² Lefebvre, 2004, 21.

⁶³ Lefebvre, 2004, 21.

through which she comes to know the city. This incredibly intimate contact with the urban space also functions on a temporal level—the duration of her rolling action is slower than that of her walking speed, and thus, not only does she come into more direct bodily contact with the city's surfaces, but she is also able to slow the rhythms of the city to match those of her body.

Her actions are about reconceptualizing the normative use of city space, as designed by architects and urban planners. The lawn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture is a highly pristine space, a perfectly flat, immaculately trimmed section of grass that runs the entire length of the building adjacent to Boulevard René Lévesque in Montréal.⁶⁴ [Figure 2.9] Despite its lushness, the pristine nature of the lawn coupled with the ascetic architecture of the CCA creates an austere atmosphere; this lawn, which is in fact raised up from street level, does not automatically invite passers by to come and lounge on it, to sit and read, or to walk across it. It instead, like a railing, is a space meant to separate the building from the streets, and to keep pedestrians at a certain distance. This expanse of immaculately manicured lawn is perhaps meant to allow passers-by the appropriate ambit from which to view the building in its entirety. The lawn thus acts like a frame around the building, or more specifically, the matting within a frame, which gives the image within ample visual breathing space. The lawn acts as a visual break, so that the CCA can be properly viewed and experienced from street level.

⁶⁴ The CCA shares the site of the historic Shaughnessy House built in 1874 to the design of William T. Thomas. The new building, designed by Peter Rose with consulting architect Phyllis Lambert and associate architect Erol Argun, was integrated with the Shaughnessy House in 1989.
<http://www.cca.qc.ca/pages/Niveau2.asp?page=survol&lang=eng>

Borsato's childlike, playful actions disrupt this space for contemplation—she ignores the 'framing' of the building and uses this empty space to satisfy her own personal desire. Her actions "boldly juxtapose diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash [that sheds] a different light on the language of a place..."⁶⁵ She does not allow the design of the space to dictate her actions within it, but rather uses it for her own means, under her own conditions. "I am trying, subtly to undermine some of the ways of moving and behaving in public that significant buildings and city planning try to determine and control."⁶⁶ Rather than allowing the architecture to dictate how she should use the space of the city, Borsato makes do with the spaces allotted to her within the urban design.

This use of space, not unlike the actions of Alÿs in *Railings*, falls into the category of what de Certeau terms a tactical action: "a clandestine form taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'."⁶⁷ For de Certeau, tactics are actions of the weak. They are hidden, ephemeral improvisations, reactions against societal structures or norms. He writes:

A tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power...it takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them...[it] must accept the chance offerings of the moment...[and] must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ de Certeau, 37-38.

⁶⁶ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

⁶⁷ de Certeau, xiv.

⁶⁸ de Certeau, 37.

A tactic gives advantage to the weak in a situation where they cannot directly affect change. They are enacted within the gaps or loopholes in normative power structures—for our purposes, the space between architecture in the city: streets, lawns, alleyways. They also take advantage of temporal opportunities, of being in the right place at the right time. “The art of pulling tricks involves a sense of the opportunities afforded by a particular occasion.”⁶⁹ A tactic is not necessarily planned out completely, but rather, takes place when the moment is right.

Borsato's rolling actions are tactical in nature. Taking place in the imposing space of both the architecture of the museum, and the institution itself, she must postpone her clandestine actions until the time is right—she cannot complete her performance if she is being watched by museum or city officials; instead, she waits for the best opportunity in which to act. Her ephemeral interventions momentarily allow her to speak back to the authority of urban design, taking that space as her own, if only for a moment. She cannot directly confront the designers of the building, rather she is able to use her body in a moment of protest against the structures of power at work here in the city space. This temporality is inherent in Alÿs's *Railing* performance, but in a less guerilla-like fashion. Whereas Borsato's timing is very much driven by the need to evade the surveillance of museum authorities, Alÿs must time his actions both to avoid confrontations with officials, but also to literally synch his performance in terms of musical timing. While the initial performance of dragging a stick on the railings was not necessarily planned out,

⁶⁹ de Certeau, 37.

and thus can be concretely defined as a tactic, the manner in which this performance evolved from its initial makeshiftness to a larger production demonstrates a slightly different, yet equally valid, form of making do.

Ultimately at the heart of these tactical performances lies the conceptual notion that each must rely primarily on the most minimal of actions on the part of the artist. As Borsato explains, each intervention is “like a minimalist performance. I wondered what would be the smallest possible gesture that could create an effect in public.”⁷⁰ Alÿs too describes his performances as stemming from an interest in “the most ‘minor’ things.”⁷¹ The subversion of, or challenge to structures of power comes not from grand, overarching gestures of revolution, but rather from the small, minute actions of the everyday. Herein lays a key parallel between Borsato and Alÿs’s work, and the theories of de Certeau. In The Practice of Everyday Life, de Certeau addresses the importance of attending to the minor, diminutive gestures in everyday life as a way of building on the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault is famous for his analysis of social and cultural apparatuses such as prisons, asylums, clinics and schools, and the way in which they condition the masses for work and production through a microphysics of power. In public settings, for instance, proper social behaviour is enforced not by a larger physical force but rather through a more ‘humane’ system of observation—through smaller gestures at the micro level, which in turn allow the larger power structures to function. A pedestrian uses the sidewalk in the ‘proper’ manner not because she

⁷⁰ Diane Borsato “Touching 1000 People” Diane Borsato Online <http://www.dianebersato.net/touch.html>. (Accessed Feb 6, 2007), n.p.

⁷¹ David Torres, “Francis Alÿs, simple passant” Art Press International, (Dec 2000): 19.

fears being arrested, but because she is worried about standing out in the crowd, of being seen as different or rouge. According to Foucault, this fear of being chastised by one's peers that maintains the status quo and in turn allows larger systems of social control retain their power.

The small, everyday actions undertaken by Borsato and Alÿs serve to subvert the microphysics of power at work in the city by quite simply ignoring these systems of observation and control. Moreover, in their minimalist gestures, they also represent an artistic visualisation of the ways in which de Certeau's consumers find alternative ways of operating within such a structure. Here, I would like to return to the paradox Alÿs points to when he describes his practice in *Paradox of Praxis*: "sometimes doing something leads to nothing." I believe that such a paradox is evident in all the works described here by both Alÿs and Borsato, but I would argue that the reverse is also true, "sometimes doing nothing leads to something."⁷² It is true that the actions of both artists seem quite non-confrontational, and may even be considered by some as ridiculously fruitless, but it is precisely in their futility that their strengths are revealed. The point of each intervention is not to inspire a grand restructuring or utopian re-visioning of the urban space, but rather, to demonstrate how even the smallest gestures can invigorate and inscribe moments of intense creativity within everyday life. As Borsato states, "I think play and pleasure and humour are tremendous sources of subversion too—to undermine power, and

⁷² This wall text accompanied the display of *Paradox of Praxis* in the exhibition *Moi et ma circonstance* at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in Nov 4 1999 – February 6, 2000.

propose another standard of empathy.⁷³ Each ephemeral action Alÿs and Borsato undertake through their performances inevitably interrupts the normative use of the city. These interventions add layers of meaning and alterity to the public space of the metropolis and elucidate the poetic elements that are always already at work in daily life.

“The everyday is *already* extraordinary; it is a virtual carnival.”⁷⁴ In this chapter I have demonstrated that the performative interventions of Diane Borsato and Francis Alÿs function to illuminate the exceptional moments of creativity continuously at work within everyday life. By invoking de Certeau’s concepts of the pedestrian speech act and making do, as well as Lefebvre’s theories of rhythmanalysis, I have shown how each artist uses their own body as a means to engage directly with the space of the city, to enter into a corporal dialogue with it, to sing its rhythms, and inevitably, to speak back to it. Unequivocally, the performances of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato reveal alternative ways of knowing the city. In Chapter Three, I will further analyze their furtive interventions and the artistic ways in which these secretive acts are discovered by, and disseminated to, a larger audience.

⁷³ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

⁷⁴ Highmore, 2002a, 148.

Chapter Three

At the turn of the millennium, a new trend has emerged in performance art in which the actions of artists are undertaken in a surreptitious or secretive manner, so as to deliberately avoid or evade the spectatorship of the audience. Identified in 2002 by contemporary Montreal-based art historian and theorist Patrice Loubier, as “furtive practice,” those artistic actions that deliberately avoid being observed—this trend adds additional complexities to the already multifarious genre of performance art. It is under this new branch of performance, I argue, that Borsato and Alÿs can be categorized. In this chapter, I demonstrate precisely how Borsato and Alÿs’s interventions fit into this new category of performance art, using both the theories of Loubier and Katheleen Ritter as models for interpreting these artists’ work. I also establish the importance of the furtive act as it is situated in the broader context of contemporary art, while sketching its art-historical affinities with Conceptual art, Happenings and the broader genealogy of performance. These furtive actions are then discussed with regards to how they are transmitted to a wider audience, through the use of artistic documentary practices. By drawing on the writings of Roland Barthes and Marshall McLuhan, my aim is to elucidate the complex relationship between performance, language and documentation that exists in Alÿs and Borsato’s work.

Hide and Seek

In her 2005 article “How to Recognize a Furtive Practice: A User’s Guide,” Kathleen Ritter—an interdisciplinary artist, writer and cultural worker based in Vancouver—describes artistic practices like those of Alÿs and Borsato as furtive: an action completed covertly or by stealth, performed in secret. Borrowing the term furtive from Patrice Loubier, Ritter’s aim is to describe and define what she terms the “surreptitious and complex ways that art today permeates civic and social spaces and conflates our notions of an ideal or expected public.”¹ According to her, furtive acts, like those performed by Alÿs and Borsato

...are both performative and temporal, existing only in the moment of [their] enactment. Performed for an incidental audience, rather than an invited audience, [the furtive act is,] by nature, performed in secret...and often disguises itself by mimicking something else, inserting itself into the social fabric almost seamlessly.²

Some furtive acts are clandestine additions to public space, such as graffiti or land art, yet most are everyday actions that have been altered slightly, whether aesthetically or conceptually by the artist, to become an artistic act. “Gently beckoning our attention, but always blending into the urban décor; disturbing, but just barely, the furtive work fits into the environment more than it imposes itself upon it as rupture or marked displacement.”³ These actions are not identified to the public as art before they are undertaken, nor are these performances the forms for which there are invitees. Exemplifying this trend, when Borsato, in *Touching 1000*

¹ Kathleen Ritter, “How to recognize a Furtive Practice: A User’s Guide Lieux et non-lieux de l’art actuel,” (Montreal: Les editions Esse, 2005), <http://www.dianebersato.net/rittertext.html> (Accessed February 16, 2007), n.p.

² Ritter, n.p.

³ Patrice Loubier, “To Take Place, To Disappear: On Certain Shifts between Art and Reality,” Patrice Loubier and Anne-Marie Ninacs eds. *Les commensaux : Quand l’art se fait circonstances* (Montréal: Centre des arts actuels SKOL, 2001), 203.

People, [Figure 3.1] sets out her quota of personal interaction and carries out the challenge for herself, she does not announce her intentions to her fellow pedestrians, nor does she alert them to her plan after contact has taken place. To those on the street, she appears as an ordinary pedestrian, weaving in and out of the crowd, ducking into a local convenience store, or browsing the fruit market. Spurred by a personal interest in the benefits of human contact to one's well being, and motivated only by proposing the idea to herself, Borsato's actions and, more importantly her intentions, remain hidden from the participants in her performance.

Her interventions here reveal an affinity to those of Conceptual artists in the 1960s and 1970s, who believed that ideas alone are capable of being works of art, valued for the intellectual concept behind the work rather than the finished, material product. In his 1969 article-cum-manifesto "Sentences on Conceptual Art," American artist Sol LeWitt declared, "ideas alone can be works of art." His writing confirmed a shift in art away from the static and autonomous object, towards a concentration on the idea itself.⁴ Furtive practices, like those of Borsato, are grounded in these conceptual foundations, and are often undertaken as personal challenges or contests for the artist herself, rather than a spectacle for her audience.

Similarly, Alÿs's furtive performances are also highly conceptual in nature. In the performance of such as *Narcotourism* (1996) performed in Copenhagen, his sole action was to traverse the streets under the influence of a different drug each

⁴ This segment on Sol LeWitt was originally written for and published in Kitty Scott and Jonathan Shaughnessy, *Art Metropole: The Top 100* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 2006).

day for a week. Like Borsato, he sets himself a simple proposition, and carries it out without publicly announcing his intentions as artistic actions. The work of art is performed completely in his head, save for the notes he made after the fact, and through his personal movement in the streets. [Figure 3.2] Walking without props or accessories, as in his other performances, he appears to be nothing more than an average pedestrian. The outcome of his performance is only slightly different when he employs the use of props. As he dribbles paint through the streets of Ghent or set out on a walk with straggles from his sweater trailing behind him, he does not explicitly alert his fellow pedestrians to the fact that he is in the process of creating a work of art. Based again on a highly conceptual proposition, his actions in *The Leak* or *The Thread (Loser/Winner)* may call slightly more attention to themselves as odd or out of place actions. Yet they are discrete enough to be overlooked by the majority of people on the street—if they are noticed, such an experience ultimately happens only by chance. A pedestrian may detect something out-of-place about the actions of this man in the street, noting “an anomaly that breaks with the familiarity of a site,”⁵ however, this rupture in the social fabric is so discrete that it will likely be marked as an accident or mishap. Paradoxically, this unobtrusiveness is at the heart of the intentionality of these interventions. It is their near-seamless integration into the everyday space of the city that allows such actions to be considered furtive in nature.

Because the furtive act “mimics or uses some element of the urban space as a vehicle and is presented without title or signage, the work may not appear as art,

⁵ Loubier, 202.

but plays with its ambiguous status to prompt the spectator into the game of attentive observation...”⁶ For Loubier, these clandestine interventions are to encourage exotic experiences of the everyday. “The...alteration of the environment, in its very subtlety, requires a moment of accommodation in order to be perceived and appreciated...Sharpening our attention, it can even lead us to find art gestures in everyday uncommon sights...”⁷ While an audience is not explicitly invited to view the performance, the act itself does cause minute tears in the fabric of daily life, small jolts or hiccups in the way in which citizens around the artist experience that specific moment of their life. Being bumped into by another pedestrian, or seeing a man dripping paint behind him may cause the viewer to be shocked, even temporarily, out of their daily routine. It is in this moment that, according to Loubier, the furtive act becomes the most successful. Thus, its near-seamless integration into the fabric of everyday life is at once necessary, and ultimately the most engaging aspect of furtive works.

It Happened in the City...

The furtive action also displays affinities with Happenings of the 1960s—plotless performative events, staged or directed by artists as a means of rejecting the ideas of craftsmanship and permanence of the arts. Often relying on audience participation, they moved art beyond the walls of the gallery, bringing it into the streets for the purposes of both artistic and political revolution. While the furtive act

⁶ Loubier, 202.

⁷ Loubier, 202.

is not to be considered synonymous with Happenings, it is helpful to understand the motivation behind such acts in light of their historical lineage.

This complex melding between art and the everyday fascinated Allan Kaprow, artist and key theorist of the New York Happening movement. In the early years of the movement, he insisted that “the line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible... [and that] the artwork and appreciator, artwork and life be inseparable.”⁸ Central to Kaprow’s approach was the notion that the “Happening is always a purposive activity, whether it is game like, ritualistic, or purely contemplative...Having a purpose may be a way of paying attention to what is commonly not noticed.”⁹ His goal was to turn the Happening into a research project that would investigate the minute practices of the everyday. “When you view a normal routine in your life as a performance and carefully chart [it] for a month...this can be basic research.”¹⁰ In a sense, the Happening was a chance for the artist to draw attention to the minutia of the everyday and to shed new light on them.

Kaprow named Happenings that were directly involved in the everyday world “Activity Happenings.” Instead of performing daily tasks—brushing one’s teeth, walking down the street—with little to no attention paid to them, Kaprow encouraged artists to maintain an intense concentration on one or two routine activities each day. “The Activity Happening selects and combines situations to be

⁸ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 62-64.

⁹ Kaprow, 88.

¹⁰ Kaprow, 178-79.

participated in, rather than watched or just thought about.”¹¹ If tooth brushing was the chosen activity, the artist would concentrate on how they moved the brush in their mouth, what it felt like and the number of strokes they used, instead of allowing their mind to wander to other tasks or thoughts. The Activity Happening was seen as a way to “consider certain common transactions...as Readymades. Their only unusual feature will be the attentiveness brought to bear on them.”¹² Kaprow’s goal was to track not only how one performed the activity, but also, how the performance of the activity was altered upon paying closer attention to it.

Like the furtive practice, the Activity Happening was not performed for an audience, as other forms of Happenings were, but were undertaken solely for and by the artist him or herself. As Kaprow writes,

What is interesting to art, though, is that everyday routines could be used as real offstage performances...Without either an audience or a formally designated stage or clearing, the performer becomes simultaneously agent and watcher. She or he takes on the task of “framing” the transaction internally, by paying attention in motion.¹³

As such, the intent of the artist is what turns this everyday activity from a simple task to an artistic action. This also rings true for the furtive act—in the moment of its conceptualization as art, the everyday act shifts from daily routine to an aestheticized intervention. As Borsato explains, these performances “start as art—that’s the line really. I conceive of these tasks considering art history, and contemporary art practices, with the intention of disseminating them somehow in

¹¹ Kaprow, 87.

¹² Kaprow, 188.

¹³ Kaprow, 187-188.

art contexts.”¹⁴ However, whereas Kaprow’s Activity Happenings were meant to be measured in a more scientific sense, for Borsato today, her performances are “useless—in that practical/product sense again—[they are] only instrumental to express myself, to propose ideas, to have and offer experiences.”¹⁵ The everyday actions undertaken in the furtive act are much more about surreptitious interactions with fellow inhabitants of the city, rather than charting one’s own daily actions. This is the fine line that divides the furtive from its predecessors. While both types of performances concentrate not on making “an objective image or occurrence to be seen by someone else, [but rather on] *doing something to experience it yourself....doing life, consciously...*”¹⁶ the furtive act is one that would not necessarily already be part of one’s daily, private routine. Rather, it is an action undertaken in the public space of the city, performed surreptitiously, as a means of altering or interacting differently with the physical space and the inhabitants of the city.

The situation of Alÿs and Borsato’s performances within urban space thus further serves to define them as furtive actions. Integrating themselves into everyday life in the city, their clandestine actions, according to Ritter, make use of “language and the ways we read the city as a semiotic space.”¹⁷ Here, she is referring not simply to how urban dwellers literally read the text of a city, its street signs and billboards—Debord’s spectacle—but perhaps more specifically to the way in which the furtive artist makes use of the city as a semiotic playground.

¹⁴ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

¹⁵ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

¹⁶ Kaprow, 195. My emphasis.

¹⁷ Ritter, n.p.

Whereas de Certeau suggests that the pedestrian speech act is a way to intervene and work within the proper grammar of the city, to create alternative ways of speaking the city through walking, Ritter's theoretical framework here seems to be more inspired by the work of one of de Certeau's contemporaries, French semiologist, literary critic and cultural theorist Roland Barthes.

Writing for a colloquium at the University of Naples Institute of Architectural History in 1967, Barthes postulates in a text titled "Semiology and Urbanism," that the urban space of the city may be able to be read as a form of semiotic discourse. "The city is a discourse,"¹⁸ he asserts. "The city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it."¹⁹ Like de Certeau, Barthes applies linguistic metaphors to the ways in which city dwellers come to know their environment, but for him, it is the semiotic structure of the city itself that is of interest, more so than the clandestine interactions undertaken within that structure. Barthes's reading of the city denies the claim by architects and city planners that there is a single or specific way of moving within, or making use of it. The city, like other semiotic structures, has no one fixed meaning, but rather, is open to multiple readings, meanings and usages. As he explains "nowadays semiology never posits the existence of a definitive signified. Which means that the signifieds are always signifiers for others, and reciprocally...we find ourselves confronted with infinite chains of metaphors whose

¹⁸ Roland Barthes "Semiology and Urbanism," *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Neil Leach ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 415.

¹⁹ Barthes, 1996, 415.

signified is always recessive or itself becoming a signifier.”²⁰ The meaning of a sidewalk, as a place for pedestrian foot traffic is not fixed, and thus could be reinterpreted as a space for any other type of performance or action. It is not the structure of the city that drives its usage, but rather, the users of the city who in turn inscribe meaning onto that space.

Barthes’s work in this text is in fact a development towards his seminal essay “The Death of the Author,” which he put forward in full in 1968. Flowing from the upheaval of the Parisian sociopolitical and cultural climate that followed the events of May 1968, Barthes presents a challenge towards the traditional, accepted authority of the author by suggesting, in relation to literature that there is in fact no set meaning inherent within a text. The author’s intended significance does not have a decisive, essential impact on the way the reader interprets and makes meaning from that text. It does not derive its meaning from the one who authored it, but rather, from its relationship with other texts and the network of relations that the reader brings to this complex web. “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”²¹ Barthes thus shifts the perception of the reader from a passive consumer, to an active producer—it is through them, ultimately, that meaning is derived.

In “Semiology and Urbanism,” Barthes adapts the triad of author, reader and text to fit an urban setting—the author becomes the architect, the reader the user or walker and the physical designed spaces of the city becomes the text. This

²⁰ Barthes, 1996, 417.

²¹ Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 148.

consequently demonstrates the broader implications and applications of Barthes's theories. In "Semiology and Urbanism," "the birth of the urban reader must be at the cost of the death of the Planner."²² As Ben Highmore so eloquently summarizes,

For Barthes, urbanists and planners may want 'all the elements of a city to be uniformly recuperated by planning,' but in actuality the urban text 'can never be imprisoned in a full signification, in a final signification'. The city in Barthes's essay is an open text, and while planners and architects may try to inscribe a meaning and an order on the city, it will always exceed such meanings.²³

Barthes's critique is not aimed at specific architects or city planners, but rather at the ideology that privileges their intentions over the actual use of the city space.

For him, "the city is a writing [and] the man who moves about in the city, i.e., the city's user (which is what we all are, users of the city), is a sort of reader who, according to his obligations and his movements, samples fragments of the utterance in order to actualize them *in secret*."²⁴ It is this secretive element that ties Barthes' thinking to Ritter's notion of the furtive practice and consequently, back to de Certeau's notion of making do—where the artist (Ritter), the reader (Barthes), the pedestrian (de Certeau) are able to make use of the urban space for their own means, secretly, without the expressed permission of the author of that space. The artist, in employing a furtive practice, is in fact in the process of a clandestine actualization of the city. Given the definition of the furtive act as an action

²² Ben Highmore, "The Death of the Planner Paris Circa 1968," *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, Jonathan Hughes ed, (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2000), 157-58.

²³ Highmore, 2000, 156.

²⁴ Barthes, 1996, 417. My emphasis.

undertaken under stealth or secrecy, the link could be made between these actions that avoid being observed, and the privacy with which de Certeau's acts of making do are undertaken. One could thus consider the furtive work of art as an expansion of one's own personal, creative use of the city space, as discussed by de Certeau. The private actions of De Certeau's walker may be considered convincingly analogous to the secrecy Ritter deems essential to the furtive artistic practice. The personal ways in which the pedestrian moves through the city spaces, choosing to go this way and not that, making up their own route based on the topography available to them is often a private, if not secret act. When walking alone, one does not announce their route to others, nor ask for permission to travel a certain way through the city. Such actions, while not often executed with deliberately clandestine or surreptitious intentions, they *are nevertheless* undertaken privately, even when enacted in public.

Accordingly, furtive acts can be paralleled with the tactics of 'making do' discussed earlier in this thesis. These private actions enacted in public, are akin to the works created by both Borsato and Alÿs, as they make use of the public space of the city, using what is available to them for aesthetic means. Through their work, artistic actions merge secretly with the everyday; private and personal choices become aestheticized as Borsato weaves between the crowds of Vancouver and Toronto, gently making contact with those whom she passes, while Alÿs's private meanderings through the city space remain concealed from the viewer, enacted, at least initially, for his own amusement and curiosity. Independently, both artists "find gaps and interstices in the social fabric that leave room for their interruptions,

revealing to us that public and social space is more permissive than we had imagined."²⁵ The actions of both artists, like most that partake in the furtive practice, mirror the personal everyday ways in which each citizen creatively makes do with daily life and world around them, and evidencing the poetics of everyday life.

Can I Get a Witness!

These actions must nevertheless enter into the very concrete, tangible artistic community as works in their own right. While each furtive performance takes place in everyday life, it can never be completely integrated because of its identification as art, and similarly, because of the artist's privileged position as such. It is thus imperative to consider the unique and highly complex relationship between the viewer and the furtive artist. In the furtive act, the artist is not "explicitly invited to perform by the people *directly* implicated by their actions."²⁶ Borsato and Alÿs are performing in such a way as to evade their audience, and therefore, do not ask permission of them when creating their artistic interventions. Borsato does not ask the one thousand strangers in the street before she reaches out to touch them. (Here, it is interesting to note the gendered implications of these actions—were this Alÿs conducting such a performance, it is unlikely that he his actions could escape accusations of sexual harassment!) If participants were alerted to their involvement in the intervention, she argues, the very integrity of the performance would be compromised.

For the pieces that involve a gesture that goes un-noticed, or that goes noticed privately and without framing as art...[the] performance is about

²⁵ Ritter n.p.

²⁶ Ritter, n.p.

a commitment to a gesture, and an idea. The gestures are such that they couldn't be performed with an audience, and would be boring if they were watched in their entirety anyway.²⁷

Borsato's work would not hold the same meaning if the people on the streets were alerted to her intentions. The furtive act takes place "in the time, place or social milieu in which one is not expecting to find art or have an aesthetic experience,"²⁸ rather than the space of a gallery and therefore, the manner in which the viewer both discovers and experiences the work is ultimately altered.

However, one must be careful not to assume that each furtive action is undertaken in *complete* secrecy, or without *any* permission whatsoever. More often than not, the secretive component of these actions applies only to the audience implicated in each event. Habitually, the artists gain permission from, or have been commissioned by, an institution in the city in which they are performing to enter into the streets and create these types of performances. Alÿs often collaborates with curators for his interventions—*Railings* was performed with the aid of ARTANGEL, a London-based curatorial collective that concentrates on commissioning intervention-based and site-specific works of art. *The Leak* was commissioned by Galerie Opus Operandi and Galeria Camargo Vilaca, Sao Paulo, while *The Thread (Loser/Winner)* was backed by both the Museum of Science and Technology and the Nordic Museum. Similarly, while Borsato's original performance of *Touching 1000 People* was performed in 2000 without the support of specific art institutions, it was commissioned in 2003 by Artspeak, as part of the group exhibition *Expect*

²⁷ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

²⁸ Ritter, n.p.

Delays curated by Kathleen Ritter, and re-performed in Vancouver. The success of these interventions is often based on institutional support, which, as Miwon Kwon points out, is characteristic of most site-oriented art practices.

Typically, an artist (no longer a studio-bound object maker, primarily working on call) is invited by an art institution to execute a work specifically configured for the framework provided by the institution...the project will likely be time-consuming and in the end will have engaged the "site" in a multitude of ways, and the documentation of the project will take on another life within the art worlds' publicity circuit.²⁹

Kwon's comments here point to an intrinsic contradiction within the furtive artistic practice. While Loubier places an emphasis on the ways in which the audience might happen upon the furtive work in situ, resulting in a moment of contemplation and intense observation on the part of the viewer, the probability of such a discovery is admittedly quite slim. After all, the artist in a furtive performance is specifically attempting to avoid being observed and to retain the secrecy of their project. "It is imbedded in the nature of the activity...[underscoring] the possibility that furtive actions may be performed around us everyday yet go unnoticed."³⁰ Because the majority of viewers will *not* experience a furtive performance first hand, our discussion must shift, as Kwon suggests, to the ways in which a larger art community receives the project. For Ritter, language is an integral element of the art works' dissemination as "the vehicle in which the works travel back to the art community after the performance."³¹ The work not only becomes available to its intended audience, ultimately the art community, through documentation—video,

²⁹ Kwon, 51-52.

³⁰ Ritter, n.p.

³¹ Ritter, n.p.

photographs, artist's writings, published articles and artist's talks—but also through “rumours that circulate about the work. While art practices often rely on the visual image to communicate the work, here the documentation of the performance serves [to] communicate the story of the work afterwards.”³² Consequently, the work must rely heavily on language, anecdote and description in order to be initially distributed, rather than through traditional exhibition methods.

For Alÿs, the fact that his art comes to be known largely through the system of language rather than through direct experience of the performance is something that he embraces, if not intentionally strives for. He describes each intervention as having a structure that is “similar to that of a narration or a story, something you can take with you, something you can steal and tell again and again. One of the few criteria I apply when I'm working on a script is exactly that, to simplify its structure until it becomes just a story, a fable.”³³ Here, his reference to the performance as a script betrays his desire to have each work function as a narrative, rather than an art object. “I like the idea that the story moves from its original specific location... I think that the ambition behind it is for it to somehow travel further through the stories of the project...maybe you don't even need to see the work, you just need to hear about it.”³⁴ This shift away from a reliance on the object of art is not new in artistic practices, having originated with Conceptual Art. What is interesting, however, is the manner in which Alÿs consciously scripts his performances so that they will translate best into a story or rumour. By reducing the

³² Ritter, n.p.

³³ Torres, 20.

³⁴ Alÿs and Lingwood, 48.

action of his performance to its simplest form—a walk pushing ice, walking while dripping paint—it becomes easily describable and retellable by those who have seen the work. “Walking happens to be a very immediate way of unfolding these stories.”³⁵ His narratives do not require the teller to remember a long list of complicated details—rather each performance can often be described in one or two sentences. The whimsical quality of each work itself, the extraordinariness of the action and its absurdity as a work of art inevitably encourages the public who encounter these works to pass them on, even if they are simply retold as funny stories, or gossip. “What interests me,” he says, “[is] something that goes against the power of the media, and to some extent, against the reproduction of the artwork being more important than the artwork itself.”³⁶ The more the story is retold, the multiplicity of versions it unfolds into, only strengthens the work. These narrative webs that are woven outside the initial intervention are a way for him to “build a repertoire of possible scenarios which could develop in their own way within the envelope of the walk in the city.”³⁷ Whether or not there is a witness to the initial performance, or an audience to view the documents of his actions, as long as the fable of his actions continues to travel from mouth to mouth, Alÿs is satisfied with his production.

For Borsato, like Alÿs, an immediate audience for her interventions in the city is not her primary concern. “It really doesn’t matter about witnesses.”³⁸ While she does not construct her performances so that they are best known via rumours, she

³⁵ Alÿs and Lingwood, 48.

³⁶ Torres, 22.

³⁷ Alÿs and Lingwood, 11.

³⁸ Diane Borsato, *Artist’s Talk*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, ON, October 28, 2006.

is very alert to the ways in which they may inevitably develop as such. "It's funny how things can change, and sometimes people invent things about works they've never seen, or that don't even exist yet. I can't control those things and try not to worry about it. *Since they are very bound up in stories, the works are vulnerable to this.*"³⁹ She too relies on inherently simple concepts in each of her works, thus facilitating the transmission of these events through word of mouth. Every intervention is about an idea or a process and at the heart of each lays complex ideas about belonging, pain, failure or nonsense that are always relatable and retellable.

The verbal quality of both Borsato and Alÿs' performances encourages their respective audiences to use a considerable amount of imagination when they first encounter these works. Yet despite the linguistic poetics inherent in each intervention, neither Borsato nor Alÿs relies solely on the verbal dissemination of their work. Each artist spends a considerable amount of time creating complex and beautiful documentation of each furtive act undertaken in the space of the city. Philip Auslander proposes that performance documentation can be understood as encompassing two categories, the documentary and the theatrical. For him, the documentary category "represents the traditional way in which the relationship between performance art and its documentation is conceived. It is assumed that the documentation of the performance event provides both a record of it...and

³⁹ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007. My emphasis.

evidence that it actually occurred.”⁴⁰ Conversely, he argues that the theatrical category includes performances that were “staged solely to be photographed or filmed and had no meaningful prior existence as autonomous events presented to audiences. The space of the document...thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs.”⁴¹ He posits that these performances only become available to an audience through their documentation. “By virtue of presenting the photographs of their actions...the artists frame the depicted actions as performances and assume responsibility to the audience.”⁴² While grounded in historical precedent, Auslander’s clearly delineated categories nevertheless become highly problematic when considering the work of Alÿs and Borsato. While the furtive actions of these two artists primarily come to be known to a wider audience through documentation, they are not staged only for the camera—on the contrary, the meaning of the work is bound up equally in the autonomous events of their performances, *and* in the documentation that is produced afterwards. Consequently, the documentation acts as both evidence that the intervention in fact took place, and, as will be demonstrated, as complete artworks in and of themselves.

“I see the photos I make generally as artworks in their own right and as documents too...[they] are important because they have the widest audience,” asserts Borsato.⁴³ She prefers her performances to “be known by the

⁴⁰ Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” PAJ A Journal of Performance and Art, 28:3, 2006, 1.

⁴¹ Auslander, 2.

⁴² Auslander, 5.

⁴³ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

documentation I create, and the talks I give...I actively try to circulate the documents and stories in mainly art contexts, where the ideas I am proposing can be felt and discussed.”⁴⁴ Her interventions are translated for a public, primarily art gallery based audience, through the use of large format digital photographs that document the artist’s various performative interventions. Patrice Loubier carefully points out, “what the viewer sees as a series of brief narratives that in fact reflect the artist’s real-life experiences, not situations staged for the camera.”⁴⁵ The photographs are highly cinematic images, frames that look as though they have been lifted from a reel of video film. Each images captures Borsato in the midst of her actions, in mid-stride or at the moment her hand stretches out to touch the elderly woman she is passing. Taken by a photographer who accompanies Borsato on her projects—“I try not to let the photographer interfere too much”⁴⁶—the images also retain the rawness of journalistic photography, documenting the intervention in a simple, straightforward composition, uncomplicated by elaborate photographic techniques. Her body is shot primarily in a full-length view, as in *Touching 1000 People* [Figure 3.1]. Attention is not placed on any one part of her body through close-up focus, and rarely is she fragmented. Interesting too is the fact that these photographs rarely show clear images of the artist’s face—she either has her back to the camera, as the photographer follows behind her, or it is diverted in her actions, as in *Rolling on the Lawn*. [Figure 2.8]

⁴⁴ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

⁴⁵ Patrice Loubier, “Food in the City,” trans Marcia Couëlle *Orange: L’événement d’art actuel de Saint-Hyacinthe*, ed. Melanie Boucher, (Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec: Expression, Centre d’exposition de Sainte-Hyacinthe, 2005), 134.

⁴⁶ Diane Borsato, *Artist’s Talk*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, ON, October 28, 2006.

Each image is printed crisply on the top half of a 70cm x 100cm sheet of glossy paper using a laser printer, while the other half is left pure white. In this bottom section, two anecdotal texts are printed in a simple, modern font—one in French, the other in English. These passages function like the artist's personal journal entry, describing thoughts, feelings and hypothesis that have motivated her to perform the intervention depicted in the photograph. "Shaping these experiences into photo-text composites is the outcome of a long process of rewriting and distilling. Several of them were originally played out in discreet encounters with small groups before becoming the subject of narrative vignettes."⁴⁷ At times, she describes the sensory experiences of a certain performance, but in most of the photos the written component is a justification for her inspiration, a kind of wondering out loud, or hypothesis for the performance. In these cases, Borsato speaks directly to the audience through the text, allowing them a glimpse into her private thoughts and feelings. She tells us, "I was feeling terribly material and ephemeral," as we see her disguised in black plastic as a bag of trash in *Wondering how easy it would be to be Garbage* [Figure 3.3]; "I decided to try and touch 1000 people...as a way to try and improve the well-being of the city," she muses as we watch her tap the shoulder of a stranger in *Touching 1000 People*. [Figure 3.1] The text illuminates Borsato's precise motivation for the viewer. Not ambiguous or deliberately confusing, each narrative is described in a very forthright and honest manner.

⁴⁷ Loubier, 2005, 134.

The simplicity of Borsato's propositions for alternative ways of interacting with the city inevitably recalls the Event Scores of Fluxus performance artist Alison Knowles. In the early 1960s, Knowles' husband Dick Higgins introduced her to the Fluxus movement and the formative ideas of musician John Cage. His concept of indeterminant composition created the preconditions for musical (or artistic) performance to be arranged without previously establishing the work's outcome, thus the ultimate form and the duration of the piece remained unknown until each performance is complete.

The concept of the Event Score, a staple of Fluxus work, grew out of Cage's theories. Rather than 'composing' the work of art note by note, the artist would write a description that provided simple, open-ended instructions for performative interventions. Through the Event Score, the artist relinquished control of the work of art, allowing for free interpretation of his or her directives by the audience or reader. In 1961, Knowles began writing her own series of Event Scores. Her choice to incorporate poignantly simple items into her works and her attentiveness to autobiographical and domestic scenarios differentiated her scores from those of her male counterparts. Propositions such as "make a salad," and "find something you like in the street and give it away," were meant to transform humble, everyday actions into ephemera of aesthetic contemplation, and at the same time, deny the art object status as a salable, nonfunctional commodity.⁴⁸ Knowles' choice to concentrate on autobiographical or domestic moments, as well as her use of sound

⁴⁸ This segment on Alison Knowles was originally written for and published in Kitty Scott and Jonathan Shaughnessy, *Art Metropole: The Top 100* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 2006).

and touch as key components of these gestures is paralleled in Borsato's propositions, serving again to reinforce the notion of a poetics evident in everyday life.

The crisp, clean presentation of each document is highly aesthetically pleasing—Borsato pays great attention to the graphic presentation of each work. The images recall the style of magazine or poster advertisements in their slick, precise design and in the placement of the text, discretely at the bottom of the composition, the way captions are often inserted in fashion magazines to describe the details of the model's outfit. And yet, despite their artistic layout, the photographs do not have the monumental quality of a fashion photograph. Instead, they have the quality of a personal snapshot or film still, focusing not on a specifically significant object, but rather, presenting to the viewer "elements of the everyday for close examination."⁴⁹ In this way, the photos draw attention to the intimacy of each action, and, by focusing on the minutia of everyday life, give the viewer a chance to "scrutinize the moments in a day that are particular to a person or a place, [the photos themselves serve] as records of the present for the future."⁵⁰ Inevitably, Borsato's photographs focus on those moments of poiesis, acting as documents to the moments of creativity found hidden in everyday actions.

In relation to Alÿs's visual art, curator Kitty Scott writes, "Alÿs's artistic practice is founded on the act of walking; it is the origin of all the early painting,

⁴⁹ Jessica Wyman, "Photographic Interventions in Public and Social Space," Contact Toronto Photography Festival Magazine, 2004, 41.

⁵⁰ Wyman, 41.

performances and photographs.”⁵¹ His documentation is not as straight-forward as that of Borsato, as he constantly shifts between various media—painting, drawing, photography and video—never relying on a single medium to record his walks. Similarities are nevertheless revealed between Borsato’s documentary techniques and the postcards, which Alÿs produces for each exhibition of his work. These artist’s multiples rely on photography and text to retell the story of each intervention, and offer a productive comparison to Borsato’s large format photographs. However, given the complexities inherent in Alÿs’ visual practice, these postcards must first be understood within the context of his larger process of documentation.

Scott describes Alÿs’s creative process as follows:

Alÿs repeatedly sketches his ideas and as the paper accumulates he develops an intuitive process for the series. From the copious amount of material collected, the artist selects figures, or fragments of figures, he wants to use and pieces them into compositions with bits of masking tape. Frequently, he writes phrases near the images. Once a drawing is thoroughly realized, Alÿs copies it yet again, this time onto a wooden panel using a paintbrush and paint.⁵²

These works often retain a very rough, sketch-like texture. [Figure 3.4] His paintings are completed using oil and encaustic with their thick impasto allowing small areas of the canvas or board to show through the paint. Alÿs’s drawings are equally sketch-like, drafted onto multiple sheets of tracing paper that are pasted haphazardly on top of one another—his choice of medium here reflects his initial training as an architect. [Figure 3.5] No larger than 25 x 20 cm, most of his

⁵¹ Kitty Scott, “Permutations of a Failed Idea,” *Francis Alÿs: le temps du sommeil*, (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 1998), 37.

⁵² Scott, 32.

paintings and drawings depict an anonymous, depersonalized man wearing a dark suit. This figure appears over and over in Alÿs's paintings, always with his back facing the viewer—his face only ever seen in profile. "This mute, stereotypical figure is also exploring the excesses of the common and the anonymous."⁵³ The ambiguity of this man forces the viewer to interpret or make assumptions about his identity. It is my interpretation that this figure is a self-portrait of Alÿs. Although physically, the man does not necessarily resemble the artist, his poses recall Alÿs's own posture in the photographic documents of his performances, and conversely, Alÿs's stance is often transcribed onto that of the man. [Figure 3.6]

As Scott has pointed out, these paintings and drawings are at once documents of, and preparatory sketches for, Alÿs's performative actions. At times, he uses these sketches to work out ideas for future interventions that will later be documented through photography "as an inventory of the artist's daily life and his imaginative capacity."⁵⁴ In other instances, the painting is completed after the performance. For instance, in his series of paintings titled *Le temps de sommeil* (1996-present), Alÿs repainted his performance in *The Leak*—an intervention originally documented with photographs and completed two years earlier. [Figure 3.7] Whether completed before or after the fact, Alÿs considers each sketch, each painting, as an artistic object in its own right, that contributes to the development of his own lexicon of imagery, which he will continue to quote and recreate over again in other bodies of work. In gallery settings, Alÿs will display this complex working

⁵³ Theriault, 28.

⁵⁴ Scott, 32.

process in full—to present a performance, he displays his paintings and drawings along side the video or photographic documentation of the actual intervention. With each installation, he also includes a stack of postcards that too act as records for each of his walks.

“For every walk that Alÿs has made, he has produced a postcard. The postcards are always available when the walk is displayed, and they are always free.”⁵⁵ Like Borsato’s photographs, these postcards capture static moments from each performance, an image in freeze-frame meant to represent the entirety of the performance. Alÿs is always present in these photographs, yet he consistently diverts his face—like his painted character he is only ever photographed in profile. He is usually photographed either from behind, or as in *The Leak*, fragmented, cut by the frame of the image, so that only the essential body parts in action—his feet, and the hand that holds the paint can—are visible. Each card is printed, either at the bottom, or on the back, with typewritten text that describes the walk, or gives instructions on how the walk can in turn be repeated or executed. [Figure 3.8] While standing as a visual document of the walk, they also double or reinforce the ephemeral nature of each performance, existing as ephemeral relics of equally ephemeral actions.

When Alÿs exhibited *The Tread (Loser/Winner)* the piece was displayed as a two-part exhibition, one half located in each museum between which he wandered. At each institution, Alÿs displayed a painting of his reoccurring male character

⁵⁵ Ted Purves “Thoughts about Travel, Souvenirs, and Contemporary Art,” *Extra Art: A Survey of Artists Ephemera 1960-1999*, (Los Angeles: CCAC Smart Art Press California College of Arts and Crafts, 2001), 42.

walking with his back to the viewer through a dark wooded area. The paintings were similar in composition and colour, yet were not identical—each was unique for its specific exhibition. Near each painting, Alÿs had installed a rack containing multiple copies of postcards—photographic documents of the walk he took during the earlier performance.⁵⁶ Free for the taking, these cards are also souvenirs of the exhibition, documenting “an act already lost, and which one might believe, may never have occurred.”⁵⁷ They too parallel the participatory nature of the Fluxus Event Score, as the text on each extends an invitation to the audience to participate in the performance as well. “More than the image, it is the instructions on the cards that carry the story or plot.”⁵⁸ In *El Colector*, he states directly the intentions of his work: “For an indeterminate period of time, the magnetized collector takes a daily walk through the streets and gradually builds up a coat made of any metallic residue lying in its path. This process goes on until the collector is completely covered by its trophies.”⁵⁹ [Figure 3.9] Similarly, in *The Leak*, he states, “having left the gallery, I wander through the neighbourhoods carrying a leaking can of paint. My dripping action ends when, having found my way back to the gallery, thanks to my previous paint marks, I hang the empty can on the wall of the exhibition space.”⁶⁰ [Figure 3.10] As writer Ted Purves notes, these postcards ultimately demand something different from the audience:

⁵⁶ Carlos Basualdo, “Head to toes: Francis Alÿs’s Paths of Resistance,” *ArtForum*, April, 1999, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_8_37/ai_54454992 (Accessed March 28, 2007), n.p.

⁵⁷ Theriault, 27.

⁵⁸ Israel, 27.

⁵⁹ Alÿs, *Postcard for El Colector*.

⁶⁰ Alÿs, 25.

If they are to 'see' the entire work, they must walk the same or a similar path as the artist in order to make their own link between the two spaces. As they traverse the distance, it is possible that they are also carrying the postcard, which they picked up at the first museum, with them. Their own walk is then superimposed onto Alÿs's and the postcard becomes something like a guide or an echo of the original gesture.⁶¹

Anyone who picks up one of these postcards can thus follow Alÿs's simple and precise directions and recreate the same walk for him or herself.

Because of their form, the postcards recall the quintessential tourist object, picked up while on vacation and sent home to loved ones, telling of one's adventures or expressing longing sentiments: "wish you were here." They act as what Purves terms "locators," acting as proof of the writer's location.⁶² When one picks up Alÿs's postcards, their validity as souvenirs does not seem to be fully realized until the viewer partakes in the artist's instructions, until she too has gone on his walk. The postcard only becomes a souvenir-proper after one legitimately takes part in the performance. Likewise, each time an audience member follows his instructions, the work is further reinterpreted and re-presented. The performance thus "escapes its own originator and becomes subject to all works of transformation."⁶³ The document here not only stands as evidence that the performance itself took place, but also that the viewer herself visited and partook in the exhibition of these works.

However, the demand for audience participation that Purves outlines in his description of Alÿs's work is not altogether as straightforward as he makes it out to

⁶¹ Purves, 41-42.

⁶² Purves, 39.

⁶³ Theriault, 27.

be. For instance, in *The Thread (Loser/Winner)*, the postcard shows the lower half of Alÿs's body, again, photographed with his back to the camera. He is wearing the bright blue sweater. As he walks away from the camera, a trail of thread drags from his left sleeve down behind him and off into the foreground of the image. The text typed over the image reads "Here is a fairy tale for you; which is just as good as true; what unfolds will give you passion; castles on the hill and also treason; how, from his cape a fatal thread; to her window the villains led." Here, the plot of the performance is not evident, nor is the manner in which the audience may realistically partake in or recreate such an intervention. The fairy-tale here is the driving force of the work—more than anything it seems as though audience participation in this instance is derived from their willingness to pass on the story of this action to others. "The action is something you can take with you, it can be 'stolen' then repeated verbally, liked a fable or a rumor that might acquire a life of its own."⁶⁴ Thus, while the texts on Alÿs's postcards both describe the work and encourage the viewer to take part, such participation is not always so overtly promoted. The postcards certainly allude to audience involvement but are not forthright in this demand. This is where I would argue that the real work of the audience takes place. These postcards certainly call for more audience interaction than Auslander's documentary images, in that they represent more than straightforward evidentiary documentation, yet they do not explicitly call the viewer to action in the way Purves asserts either. They instead leave a gap open, into which the viewer can enter, if they so choose, to either recreate the walk or

⁶⁴ Israel, 27.

redistribute the fable of the performance to others in their circle. For Alÿs it is this passing on of the story that helps his performative actions live on, more so than the photographic document alone.

Borsato also gently entices the viewer to enter her work using the text component of her documentation; her writing acts as a way to invite the audience into each performance, to engage us with her interventions into the everyday. "I see the writing itself as performative," she says, "in that I'm trying to reproduce or evoke the feelings around the pieces, rather than describe them objectively. It's more personal and literary than academic. I'm concerned with the actions, and the documents, equally."⁶⁵ The frankness and honesty with which she addresses the audience through these text panels invites an intimate interaction with the artist—the viewer feels as though she has just shared a private thought or secret. Borsato pushes tenderly, inspiring the audience to re-introduce personal politics or play into their own experiences of the everyday. The viewer is called to become part of the drama of these performances, to experience the sensuality of rolling on the grass, or grazing the hand of another human being. As the viewer is permitted to be witness to Borsato's furtive actions, she is encouraged to recognize these moments of possible sensual experience in the everyday that she may not have otherwise been alert to.

The sense of intimacy and gentleness associated with Borsato's works manifests itself not only in the way the text speaks directly to the viewer, but also in the specific relationship Borsato has established between these textual revelations

⁶⁵ Personal Communication via email with Diane Borsato, April 6-9, 2007.

and the images they are paired with. Writing each panel from the first person perspective, Borsato seems to be conscious of not closing her images with overt descriptions. The text does not directly give details about what is happening in the photograph, but rather introduces the viewer to her train of thought—Borsato does not explain what it was like to be in the garbage bag, but expresses her need to discover that sensation. As such, the viewer's own subjective concerns are made room for—what do they consider disposable, ephemeral? What are their experiences with trash? What makes them feel 'like' garbage? Conversely, the photograph gives the viewer a cinematic glimpse into the end result of the performance, yet leaves no indication of how Borsato got from her hypothesis to the action that was documented.

Art historian Jessica Wyman suggests that, in intentionally presenting information that is not quite complete, Borsato's images function 'coolly' in Marshall McLuhan's sense of the word—"their engagement requires a great deal of participation from the viewer."⁶⁶ As McLuhan describes in *Understanding Media*, "hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience."⁶⁷ Cool media, as opposed to hot media for McLuhan, require a high level of audience participation; due to their low definition—that is, the little amount of data they contain. As he describes, "old prints and woodcuts, like the modern comic strip and comic book, provide very little data

⁶⁶ Wyman, 42.

⁶⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Ed W. Terrence Gordon, (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 2003), 39.

about any particular moment in time, or aspect in space, of an object. The viewer, or reader, is compelled to participate in completing and interpreting the few hints provided by the bounding lines.”⁶⁸ The result is thus a high degree of participation by the viewer.

In Borsato’s work, there remains an ambiguous gap between the photograph and the accompanying text. Like the reader of a comic book, the audience of Borsato’s work must piece together the limited information presented to them by the artist. Rather than explicitly revealing all the details of her furtive performances, Borsato leaves holes in her documentation that allow for the viewer to insert their own interpretations of experiences directly into each work. This gap is facilitated by the fact that neither the text nor the photograph are a direct translation of one another—her emotions expressed in the text are not captured in the imagery, but rather, act as hypothetical statements that appear to have instead inspired the action. I propose that this breathing space is where we, as viewers, are invited to insert ourselves into Borsato’s interventions. “She does not ask us to share her intimate relations, but to think more consciously of our own.”⁶⁹ In this sense, Borsato’s photo-documents, like those of Alÿs, require the viewer to become an active participant. Our own tactile memories are made room for, giving rise to the possibility of perceiving the work in fuller ways, to remember our experiences with the objects she encounters, perhaps even provoking our own performance of Borsato’s gestures. The viewer’s imagination is permitted to run wild within the

⁶⁸McLuhan, 40.

⁶⁹Wyman, 42.

opening between the text and the image—Borsato does not lead us to specific conclusions but rather leaves room for multiple interpretations.

These gaps left in both Alÿs and Borsato's performance documentation promote an interpretation of them as "writerly" texts as described by Roland Barthes. In *S/Z*, Barthes differentiates between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts as a way of understanding how various forms of literature function in terms of audience reception and participation. For Barthes, a readerly text is considered static, "a product"⁷⁰ in which the meaning is fixed and predetermined. The reader of the readerly text is simply a site to receive the information of that text. Conversely, Barthes privileges the writerly text, as a text that is a work in progress. "The reader [is] no longer a consumer but a producer of the text."⁷¹ Thus reading becomes for Barthes "not a parasitical act," but rather a "form of work."⁷² Very much linked to his notions of the death of the Author, the writerly text creates a space where the reader is invited to be an active participant in the construction of meaning in the work. The reader thus takes part in this "labour of language"⁷³ wherein reading is not a passive chore, but a performative activity that "does not aim at establishing the truth of the text (its profound, strategic structure), but its plurality (however parsimonious)."⁷⁴ As opposed to using the text to dictate a fixed meaning in their photographs, the mutable space left between the text and the image in both Borsato and Alÿs's documentation serves as a site for the continuous

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.

⁷¹ Barthes, 1974, 4.

⁷² Barthes, 1974, 10.

⁷³ Barthes, 1974, 11.

⁷⁴ Barthes, 1974, 14.

(re)production of meanings, where the audience is permitted to enter, read, and re-interpret the narrative behind these works.

Like McLuhan's 'cool' media, or Barthes's 'writerly texts,' Alÿs and Borsato's visual documents encourage an active collaboration with their audience. When theorized as such, it becomes evident that each artist's documents leave participatory gaps for their audiences to fill, whether it is in the retelling and recreation of the stories on Alÿs's postcards, or in their engagement with Borsato's first-person diaristic confessions. The open relationship these artists create between their photographs and text allows the viewer to insert his or her own subjectivities, memories and experiences into each document, remaking it over and over again with each new reading. Similarly, by diverting their own physical presence in each photograph, the audience is further able to insert themselves into each document, imagining themselves in the place of the artist, in the shoes of the walker. The deliberate, productive space left in these works ultimately interpellates the viewer to engage both actively and imaginatively with Alÿs and Borsato's work.

This free space for audience participation is evidence that neither artist considers the visual components of their interventions as purely 'documentary' in Auslander's sense. The textual complexities, visual richness and the consideration made for the audience present in each document make these works so much more than merely evidence of past performances. And yet, neither of these works can be considered entirely 'theatrical.' For each artist, the physical performance and resulting visual documents carry an equal weight—the former is not created to facilitate the latter; they are in fact only *one of* the ways an audience will come to

know each performance. Alÿs and Borsato's furtive interventions function at the level of performance, of rumours *and* as visual art, and are distributed to their larger audience through a highly complex web of language.

By considering Alÿs and Borsato's performative interventions as furtive practices, in this chapter I have contextualized these artists' practices within the newly-emerging field of contemporary art that privileges surreptitious interactions with the viewer, and encourages clandestine behaviour within the urban space of the city. In doing so, I have traced a lineage between the furtive practice, Conceptual Art and Allan Kaprow's Happenings, while highlighting the institutional challenges these secretive practices present. This chapter has been the space for me, as a viewer, to insert my *own* active readings into the productive gaps that exist in Alÿs and Borsato's documentation, and by bringing together the theories of Michel de Certeau, Roland Barthes and Marshall McLuhan, I have revealed both the semiotic potential and the visual complexity of their artistic practice.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the act of walking in the contemporary performance art of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato. Through this research, I have demonstrated how walking can be employed as an artistic act, as well as mode of cultural resistance that reinvigorates everyday life with moments of poetic creativity. By theorizing each intervention as a way for these artists to achieve an unmediated bodily engagement with the morphology of the city, I have also elucidated the subversive, creative and critical potential of walking.

This research topic was born out of my interests in politically-motivated works of art—I drew specific inspiration from the ways in which the Situationist International attempted in the 1960s to bring about a complete revolution of the urban environment by simply walking through the space of the city in a new, exciting and ultimately subversive manner. By beginning with a discussion of their interventions and then moving into the contemporary period, my initial aim was to understand how such practices had been translated into the work of artists today—to determine the deeper political, aesthetic and theoretical implications of walking in contemporary art.

To do so, I have focused this investigation on the performance art of Francis Alÿs, an established artist of Flemish origin based in Mexico City, and that of Torontonians Diane Borsato, an emerging Canadian artist. I have linked the interventions of these artists to their historical predecessors the Situationist

International, as well as the Dadaists and Surrealists, while at the same time drawing out the subtle differences and similarities between these activist walkers, and the more gentle, poetic actions of Borsato and Alÿs. I have demonstrated how each artist's work can be better appreciated in light of Michel de Certeau's theories of the everyday, and also how such performances can be understood as occupying the newly conceptualized category of the furtive practice in contemporary art. I have also shown the importance of language and documentation in these furtive practices, asserting that in both artists' case, the aesthetic consideration and complex relationship at work in each document qualifies them as being at once evidence of these ephemeral art performances, and works of art in and of themselves. By theorizing Alÿs and Borsato's performances as a visualization and articulation of de Certeau's poetics of everyday life, as well as a conversation between the artists' body and their environment, I have shown how walking is a highly charged form of personal locomotion, capable of both interpreting and manipulating urban space; an embodied and active way of understanding and knowing the world.

This research makes a valuable contribution to contemporary Art History in the way it draws out intricacies within Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato's work that have yet to be fully theorized by the discipline. First and foremost, the pairing of Alÿs and Borsato in a comparative analysis has never before been completed. By interweaving the theories of Michel de Certeau (which have from time to time been tied to Alÿs's work) and those of the furtive practice (that have in alternative manners been used to discuss Borsato's interventions), this research represents a

reconceptualization of these two highly engaging artists at various stages in their respective careers. To my knowledge, this is also the first time Henri Lefebvre's theories of rhythmanalysis and Barthes's writings on urban space have been applied to the visual arts in general, let alone the practices of Alÿs and Borsato. The purpose of this research is to build on the existing discourses that surround both artists' work, and more generally, to shed light on the potential of everyday actions in contemporary art.

This research program has opened up a multitude theoretical and art historical avenues that may be explored in my future written or curatorial projects. Throughout the time I have spent on this project, I have become extremely interested in recent developments in contemporary art that centre on relational aesthetics or social and community-based interventions. Both Borsato and Alÿs have created projects that are based entirely on the participation and collaboration of individuals in their respective localities that unfortunately, did not fit into the scope of this thesis. I am drawn to the ways in which these works also take place both within and beyond the walls of the gallery, and make further use of the complex social space of the everyday. Curatorially, I have grown exceedingly interested in how these interventions, like those discussed in this thesis, are translated into the space of the gallery, and the innovative, experimental exhibition design they both initiate and inspire. My research here has only begun to scratch the surface of this topic, and I would very much like to further explore the possibilities for institutional critique that lie within both Alÿs and Borsato's work, and how they concurrently fit into a larger and altogether different branch of contemporary art.

Walking has been considered here as art, as writing and as reading, as a way of knowing. It has been discussed as a deeply personal, yet emphatically public action, as an interpretive act, a generative act and an embodied act. Through the investigation of the performance interventions of Diane Borsato and Francis Alÿs, I have reached a greater understanding of contemporary art practices that are based more in the act-of-doing rather than in the act-of-making. In these artists' peripatetic approach to performance, the city has been revealed as holding great potential as an interlocutor, as a space of confluence and exchange, of possibility and of poetry, and a space where everyday life can in fact become a work of art.

Figures

Figure 1.1

Ivan Chitchevlov *Métagraphie*, 1952.



Figure 1.2

T: Guy Debord *Guide psychogéographique de Paris*, 1957.

B: Guy Debord *The Naked City*, 1957.

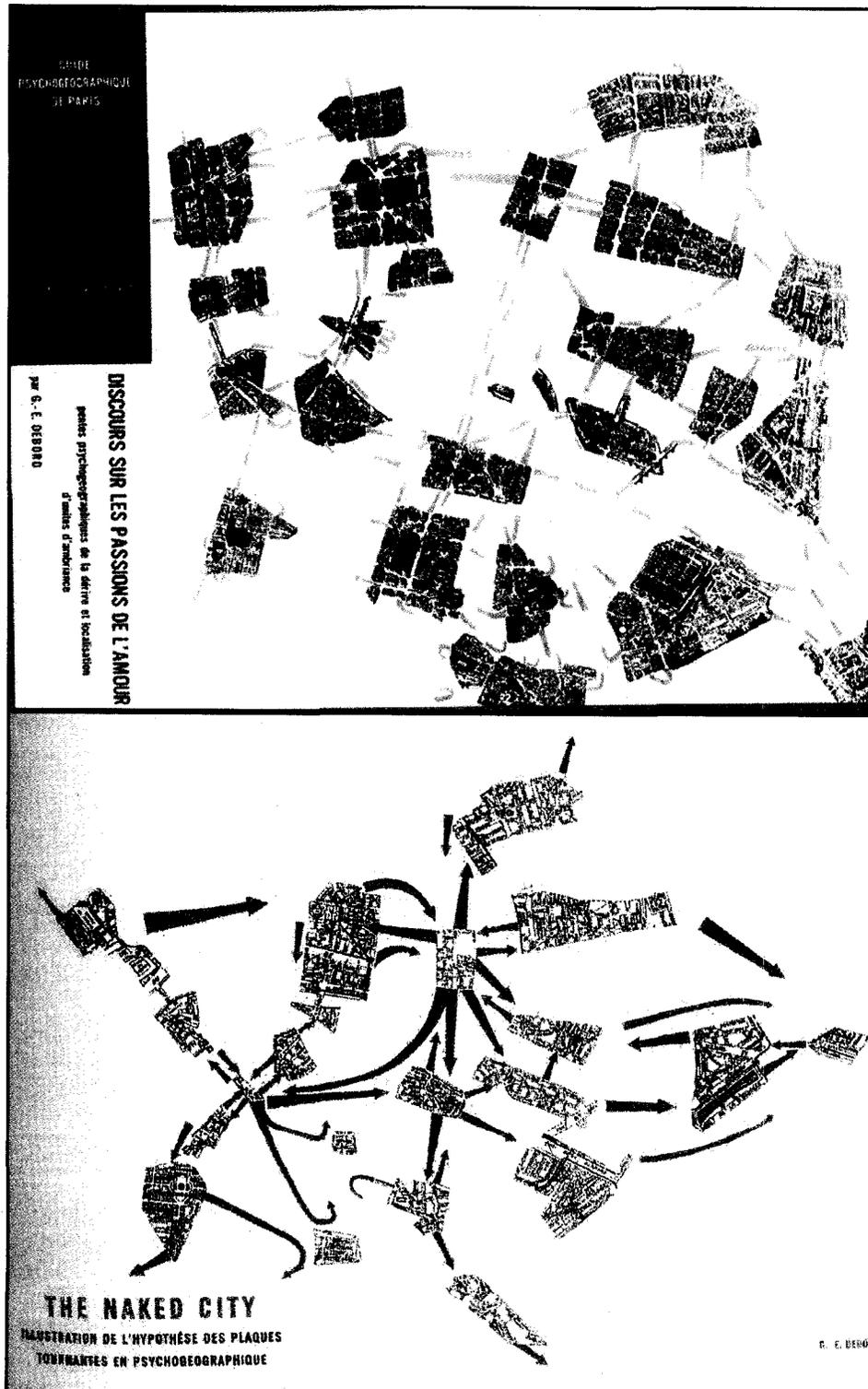


Figure 1.3

Surrealists gathering at Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris April 1921, 1921.



Figure 1.4

L: Working draft of invitation for the first visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, c. 1921.
R: Flyer invitation for the first visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, c. 1921.

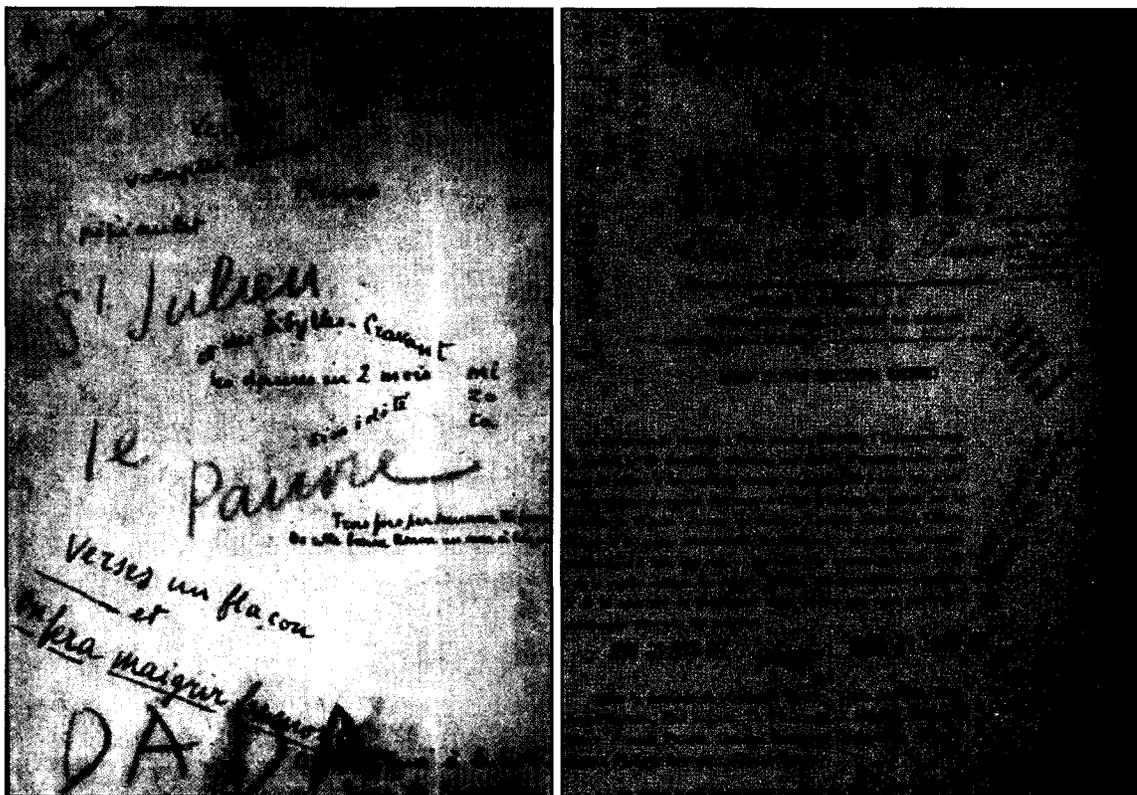


Figure 1.5

Le Corbusier *Unité d'Habitation*, 1946-52.

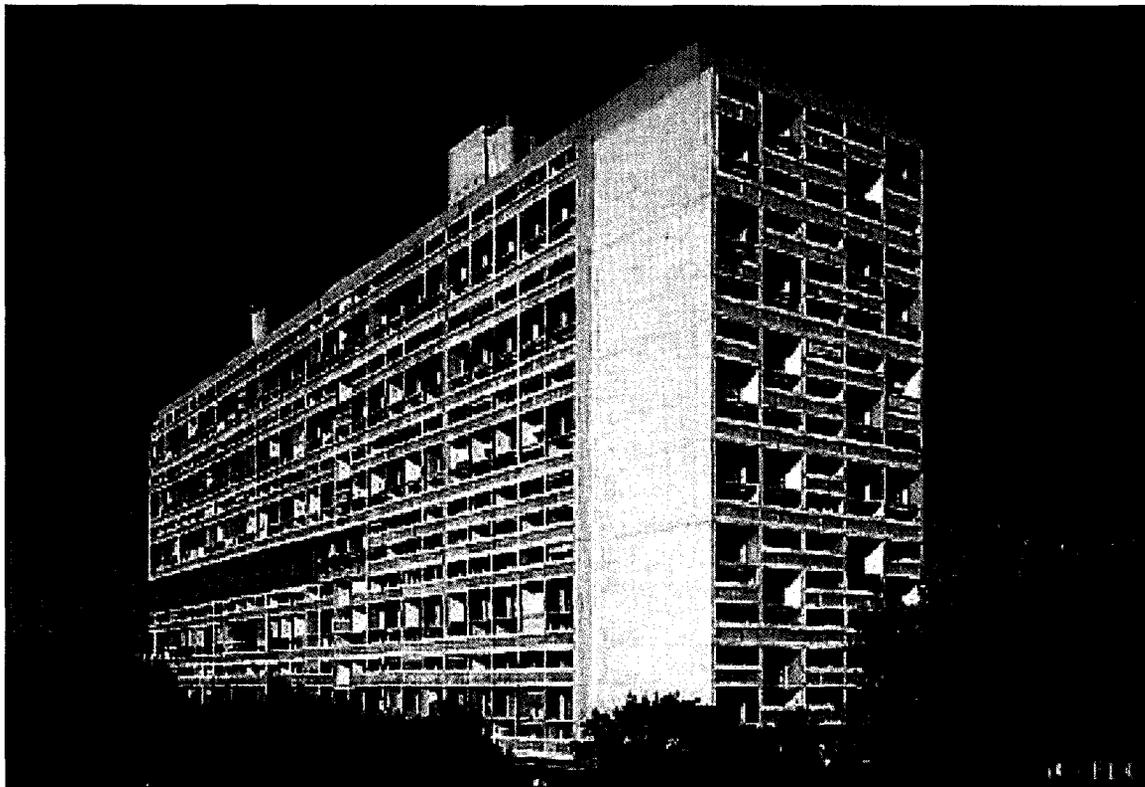


Figure 2.1

Francis Alÿs *The Leak*, 1995.

Top Left and Bottom: Photographic Documentation.

Top Right: Installation view.

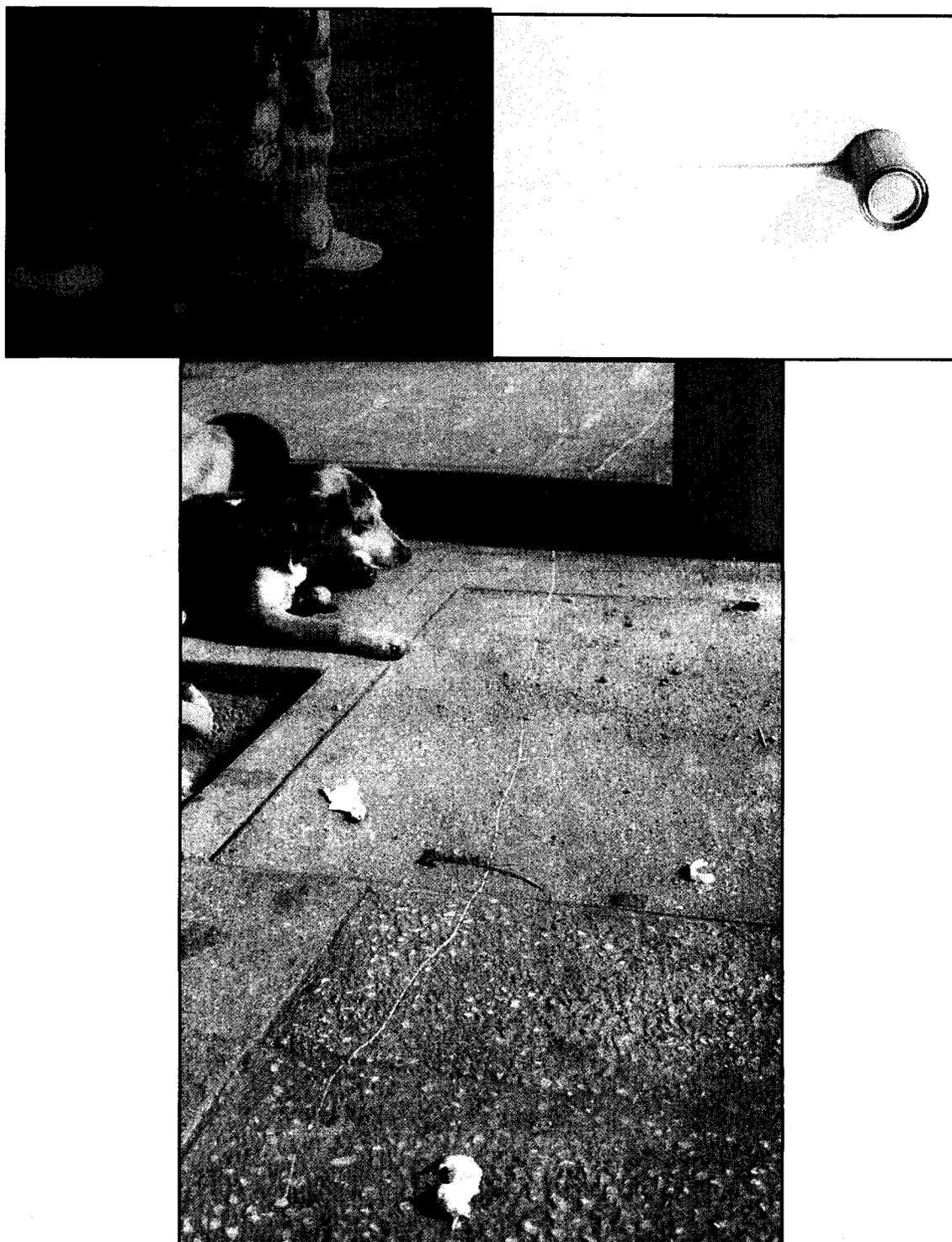


Figure 2.2

Francis Alÿs *The Thread (Loser/Winner)*, 1998.

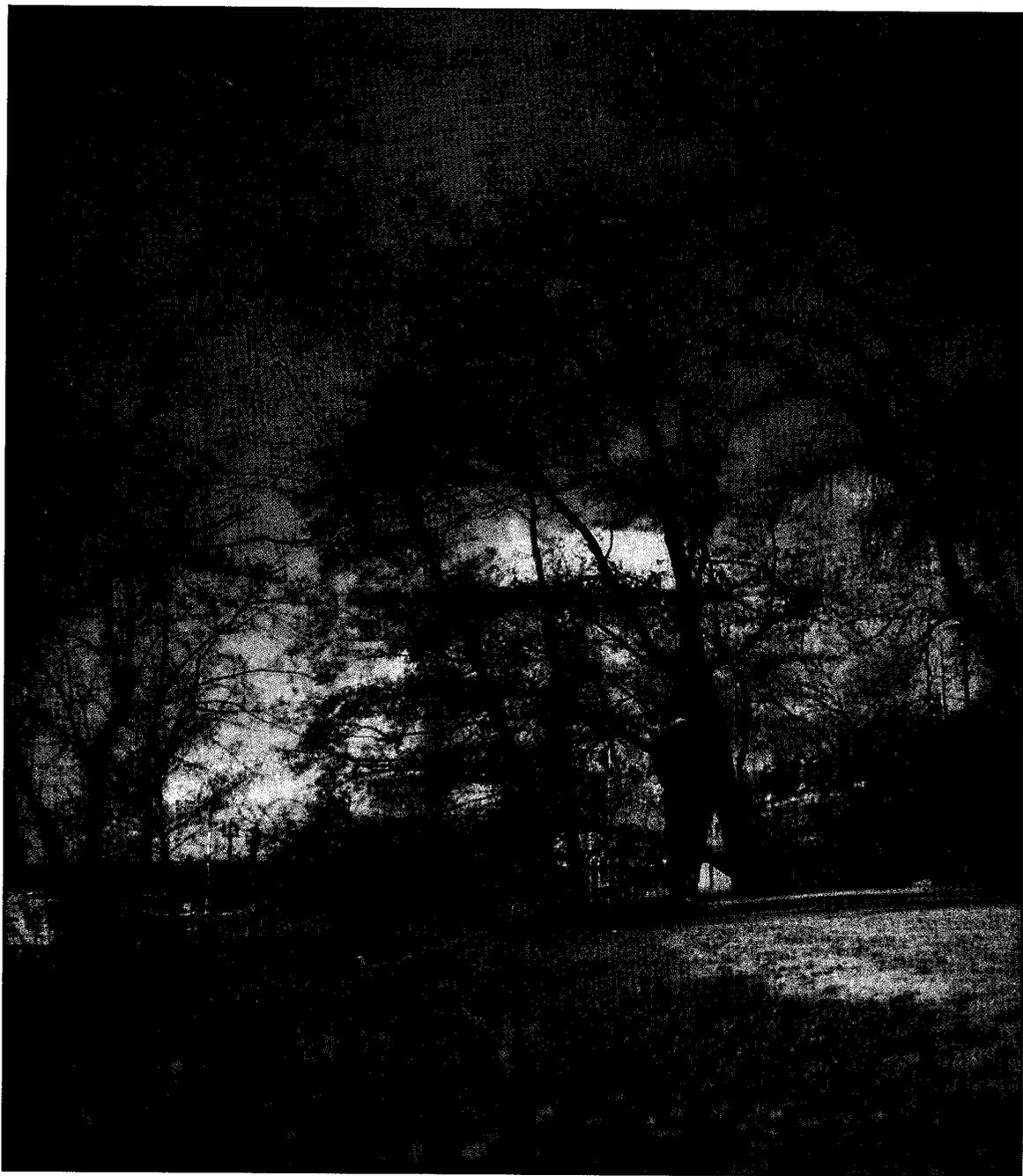


Figure 2.3

Diane Borsato *Touching 1000 People*, 2000.



Figure 2.4

Francis Alÿs *El Colector*, 1991-92.

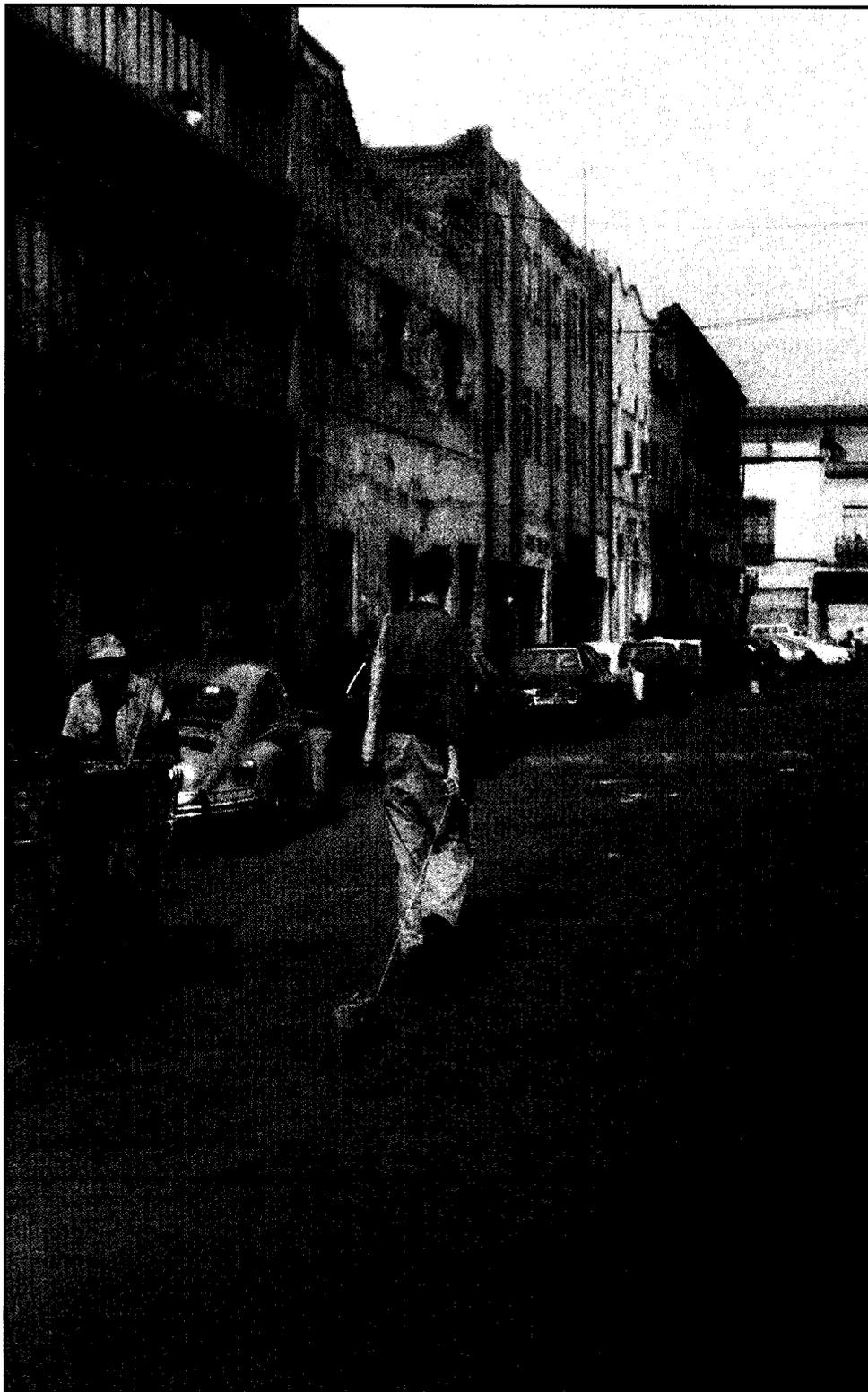


Figure 2.5

Diane Borsato *How Easy it would be to be Garbage*, 2002.



Figure 2.6

Francis Alÿs *Paradox of Praxis* (sometimes doing something leads to nothing), 1997.

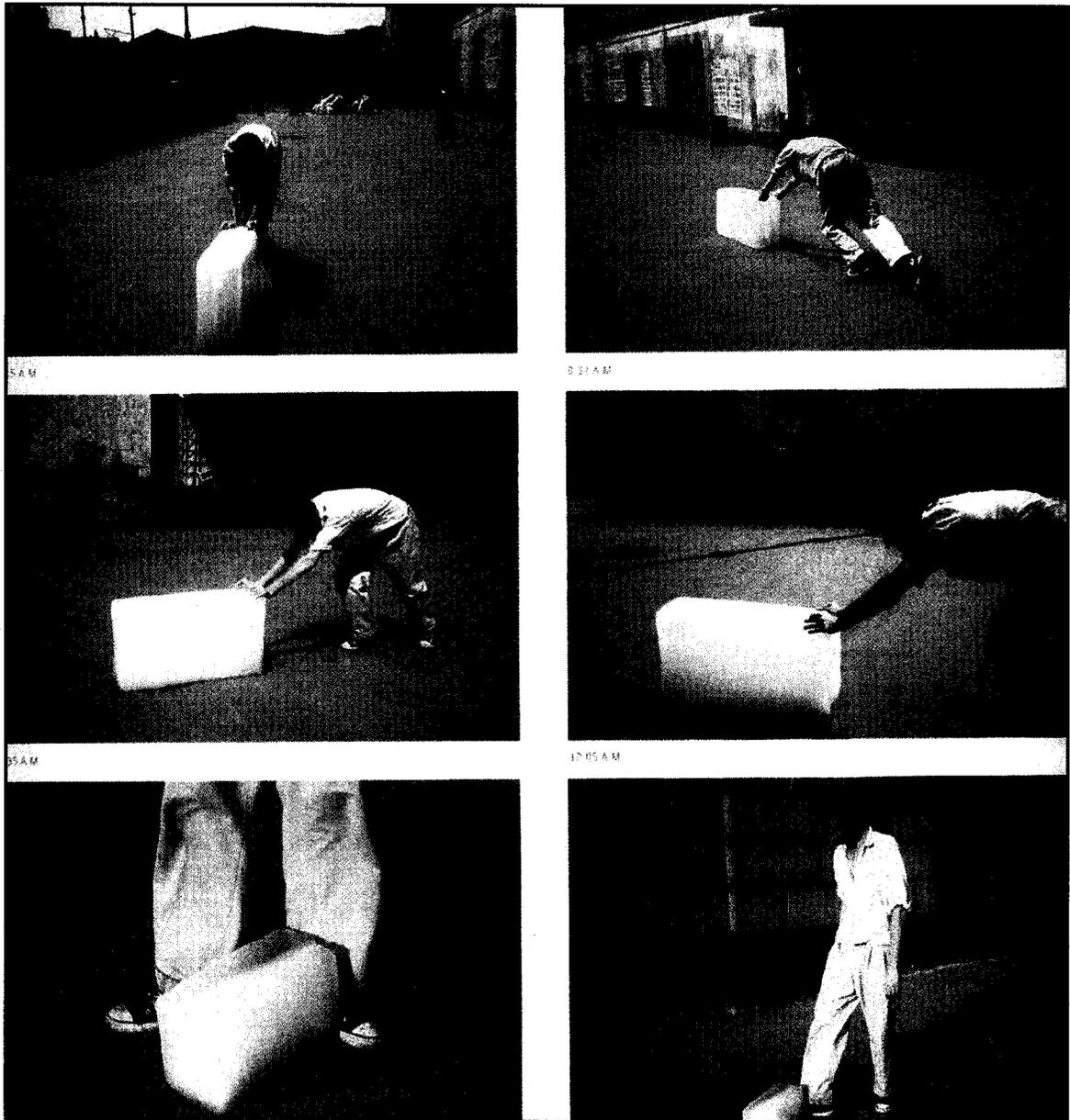


Figure 2.6 (cont.)

Francis Alÿs *Paradox of Praxis* (sometimes doing something leads to nothing), 1997.

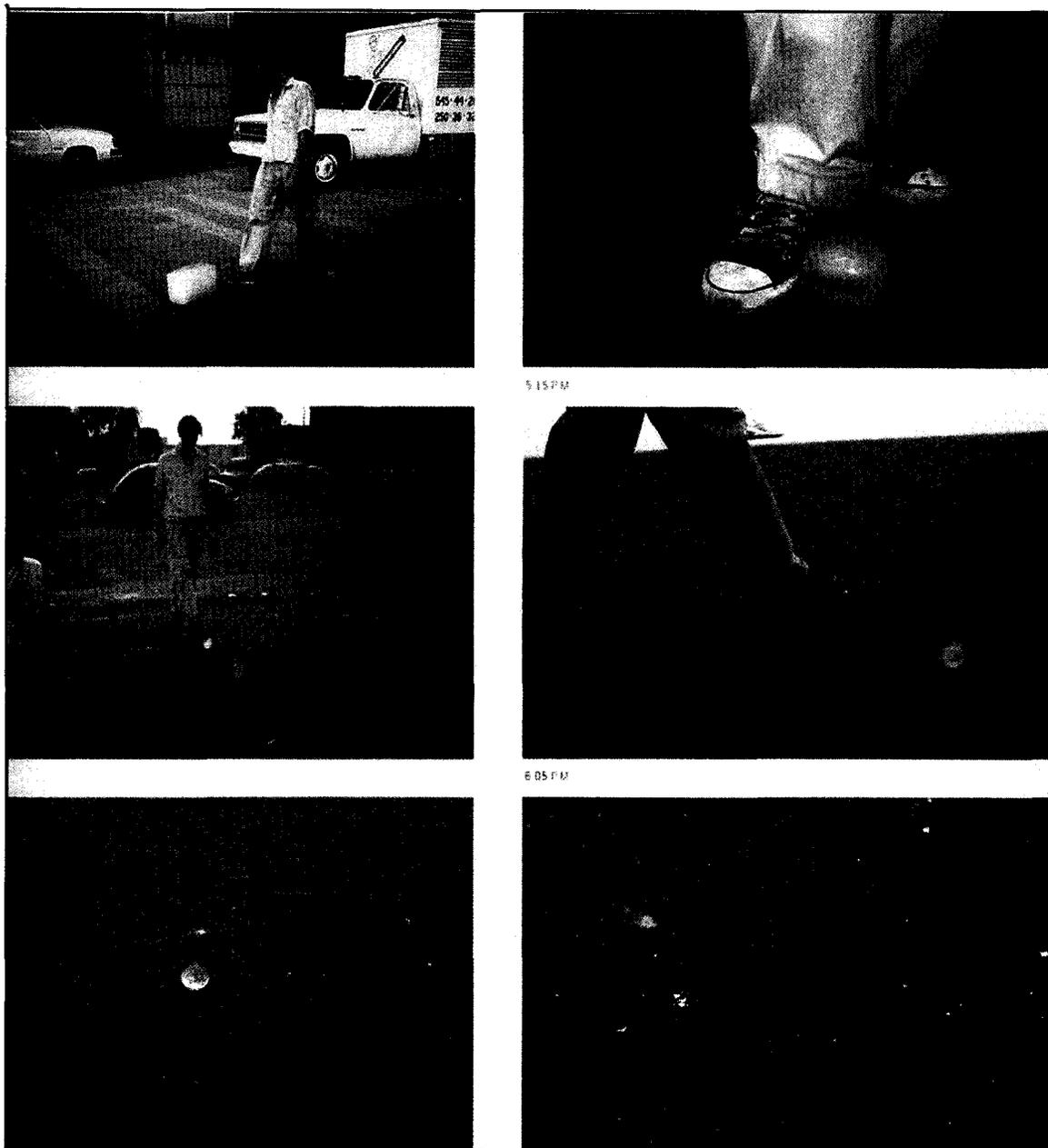


Figure 2.7

Francis Alÿs *Railings* 2000.



Figure 2.7 (cont.)

Francis Alÿs *Railings* 2000.

T: Video Documentation.

B: Musical Notations of the Railings.

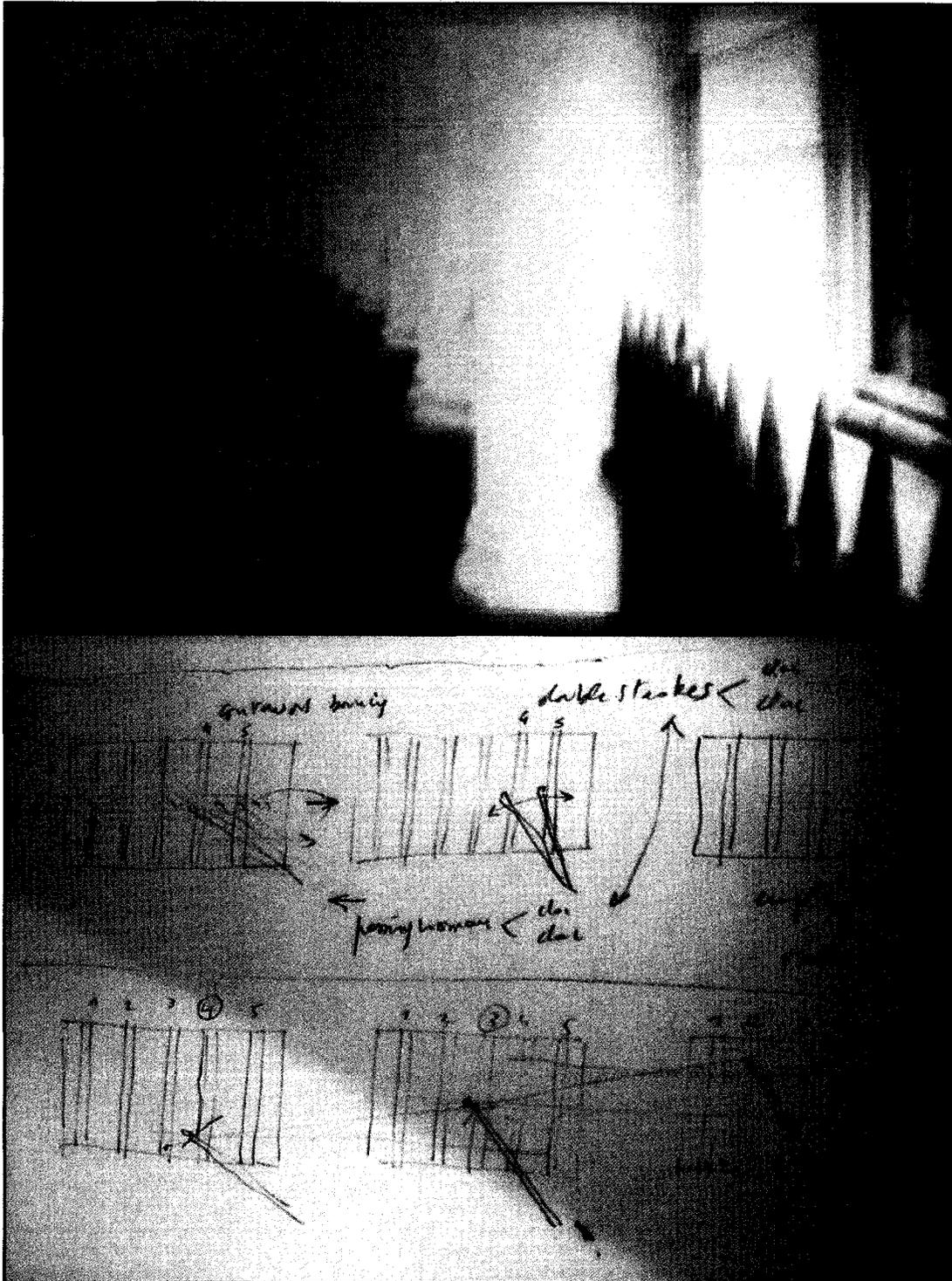


Figure 2.8

Diane Borsato *Rolling on the Lawn at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), 2000.*



Figure 2.9

The Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.



Figure 3.1

Diane Borsato *Touching 1000 People*, 2000.



J'ai lu à propos d'une étude qui suggère que toucher les gens de façon subtile - même s'ils ne le remarquent pas ou ne l'en soulignent pas - pouvait même influencer leur façon d'être. J'ai décidé, comme tentative d'initiation à la façon d'être de la ville, d'essayer de toucher sans personnes en un mois. Je me suis mise à donner de petites tapes, à baloter, à baloter légèrement les épaules dans les rues, le métro, les magasins, les magasins. Puisque je commençais consciemment et me promettais avec moi-même en guise d'essai, j'ai commencé à reconnaître le besoin de contacts de toutes sortes. Je ne pouvais m'empêcher de sentir des inconnus, de caresser les chiens en laisse devant les magasins, de lancer des blagues aux personnes de haut et de bas d'un air nerveux fatigué.

I read about a study that suggested even people who touched subtly - even if they don't notice or acknowledge it - that it can actually improve their well-being. I decided to try to touch 1000 people over the course of a month, as a way to try to improve the well-being of the city. I went out of my way to tap people and lightly touch or to stroke or to pat or to stroke the necks of the dogs in the park. Since I was doing this consciously with me, I started making friends with the people I was touching. I couldn't help myself from smiling or laughing, talking to people and even feeling like I was being touched myself.

Figure 3.2

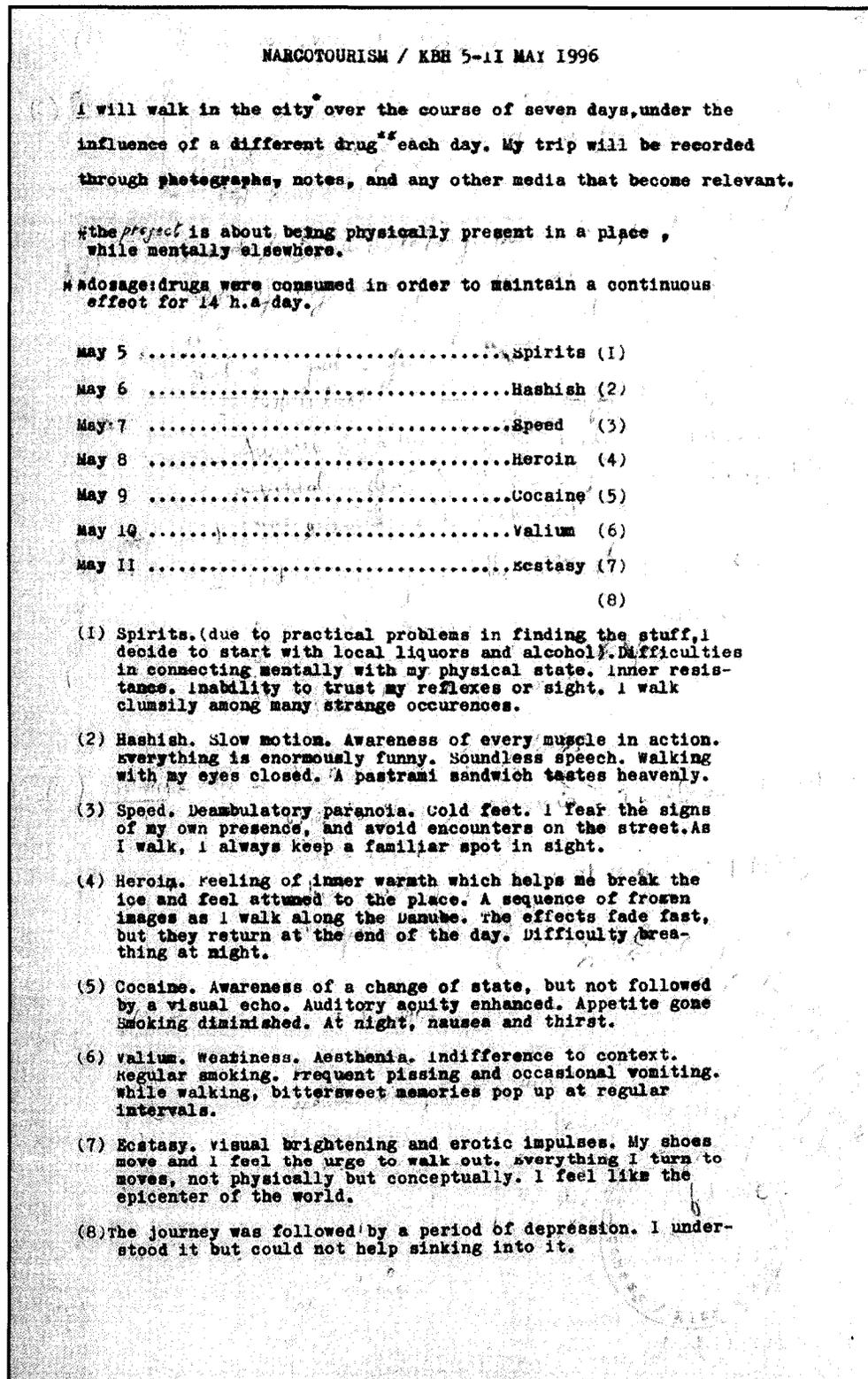
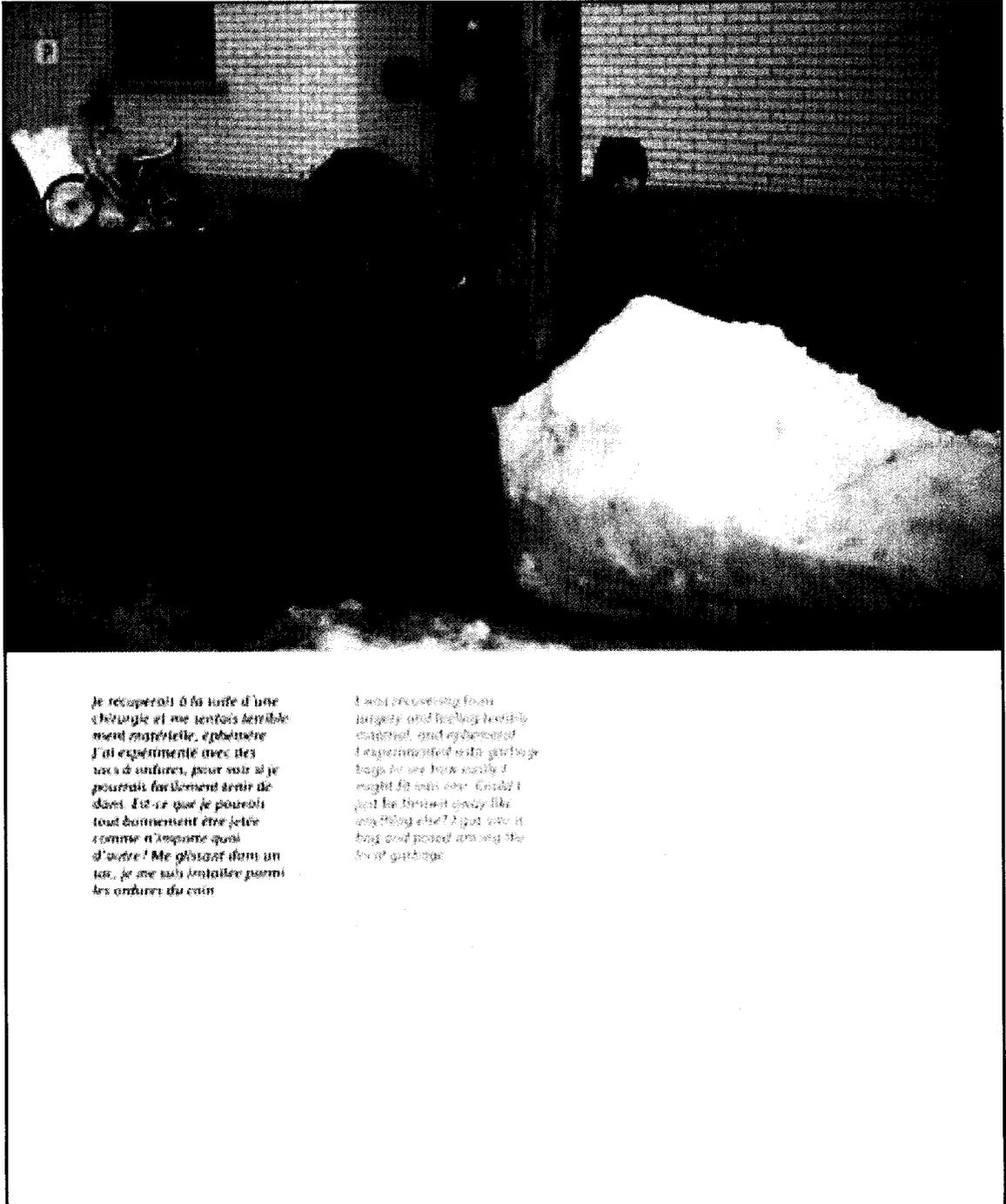
Francis Alys *Narcotourism*, 1996.

Figure 3.3

Diane Borsato *How Easy it would be to be Garbage*, 2002.



Je récupérerais à la suite d'une
 chirurgie et me sentais terrible-
 ment épuisée, éphémère
 J'ai expérimenté avec des
 sacs à ordures, pour voir si je
 pourrais facilement tenir de
 dans. Et ce que je pourrais
 tout simplement être jetée
 comme n'importe quoi
 d'autre! Me glissant dans un
 sac, je me suis installée parmi
 les ordures du coin

I was recovering from
 surgery and feeling terribly
 exhausted, and exhausted
 I experimented with garbage
 bags to see how easily I
 might fit into one. Could I
 just lie there as easily like
 anything else? I got into a
 bag and passed among the
 rest of garbage

Figure 3.4

Francis Alÿs *The Profit*, c. 2004.

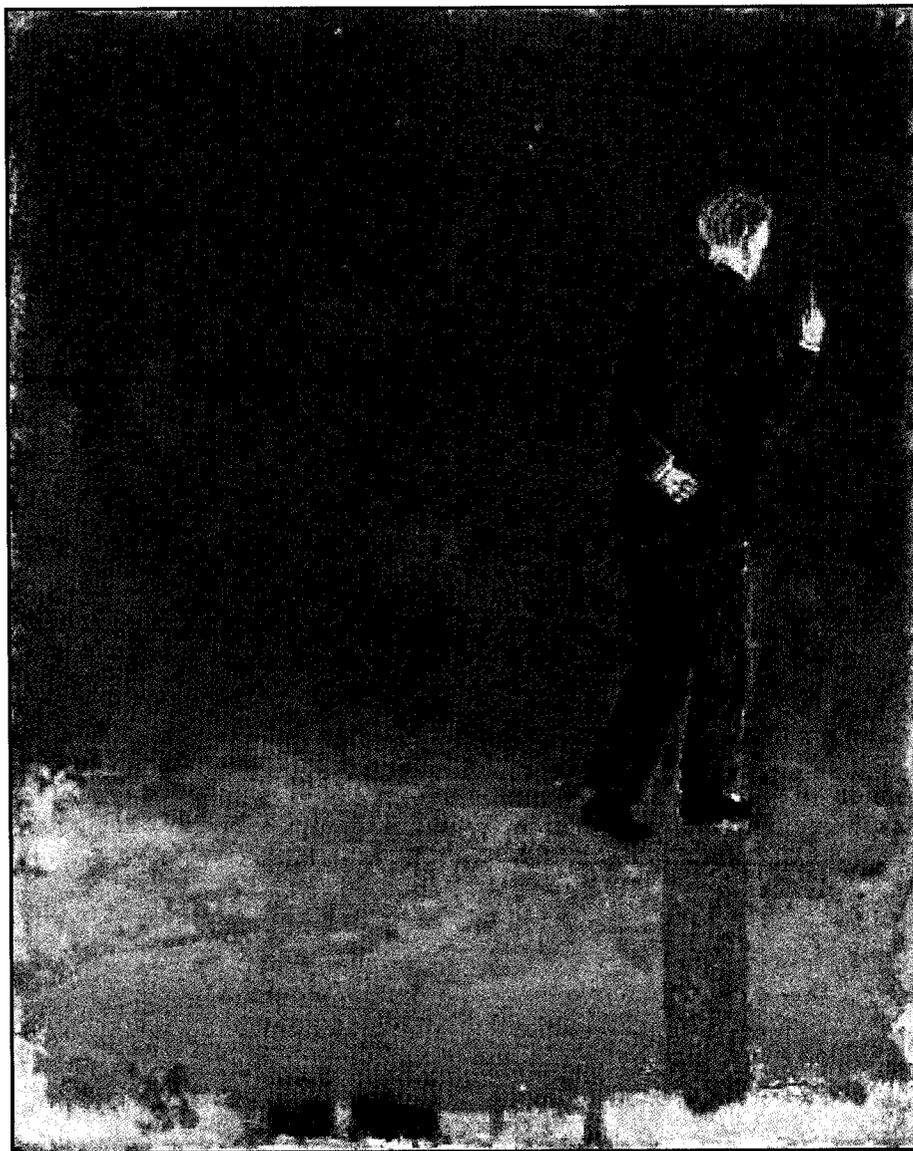


Figure 3.5

Francis Alÿs Drawings for *Railings*, 2004-2005.

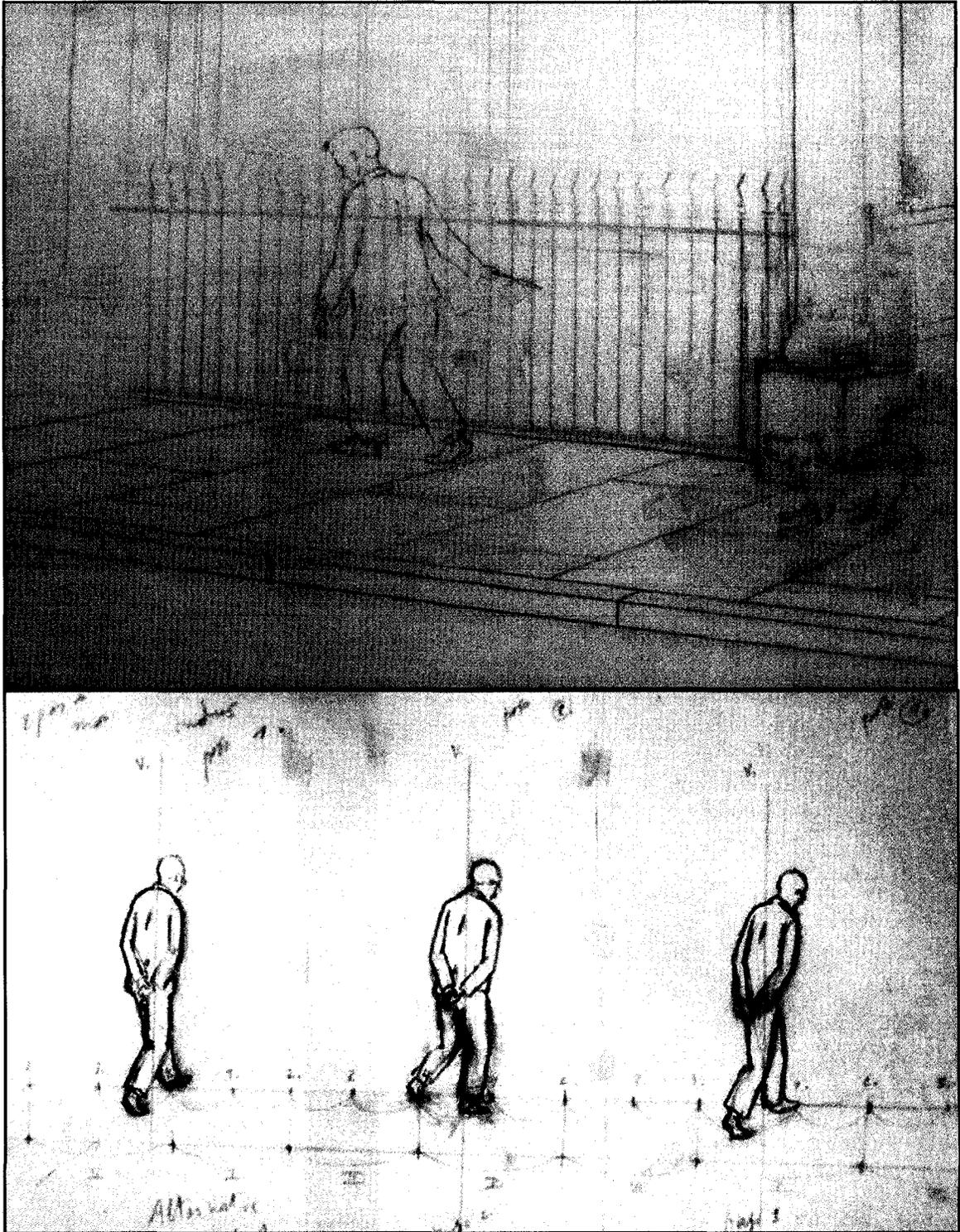


Figure 3.6

Francis Alÿs Sketch for *Railings* 2004-2005.

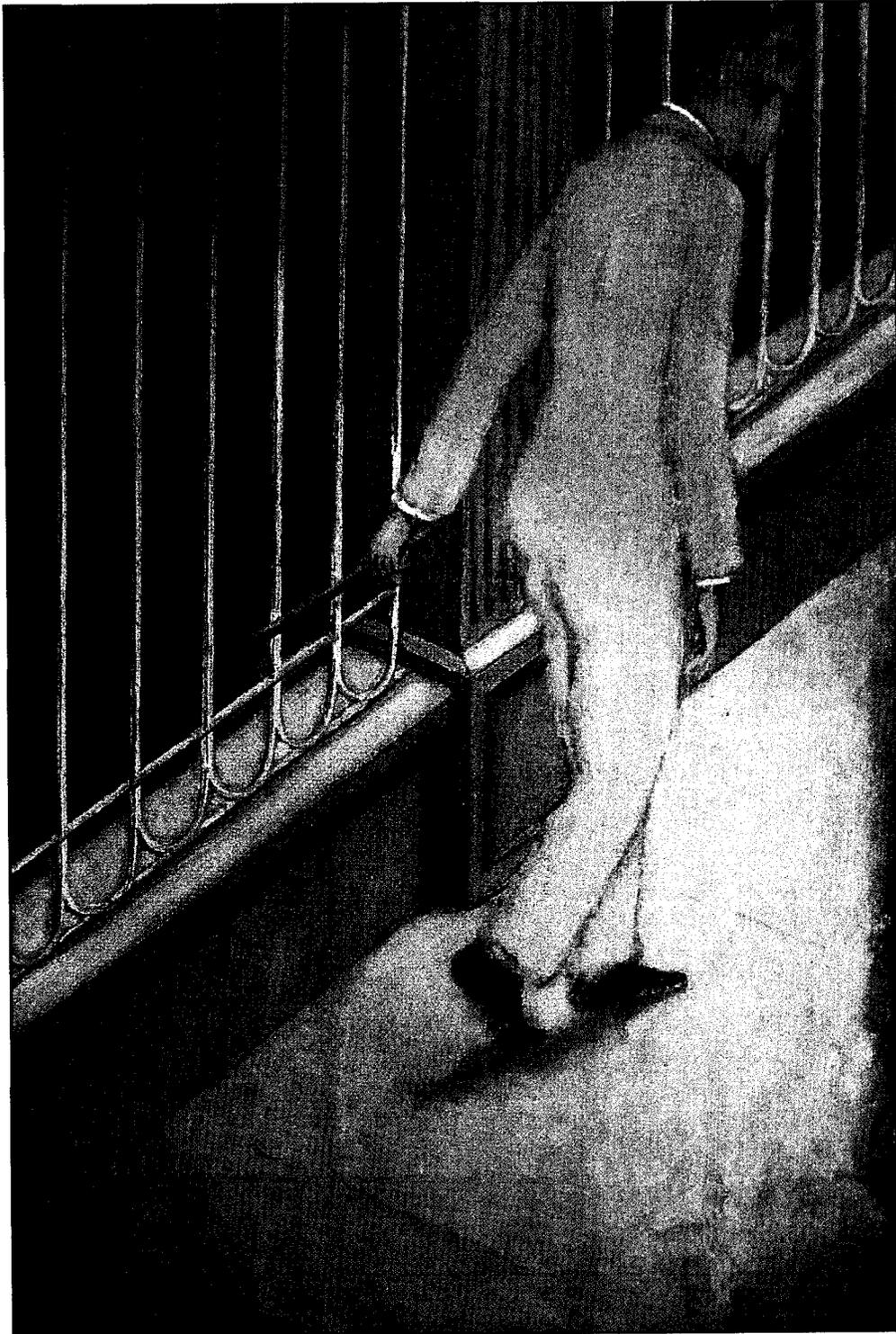
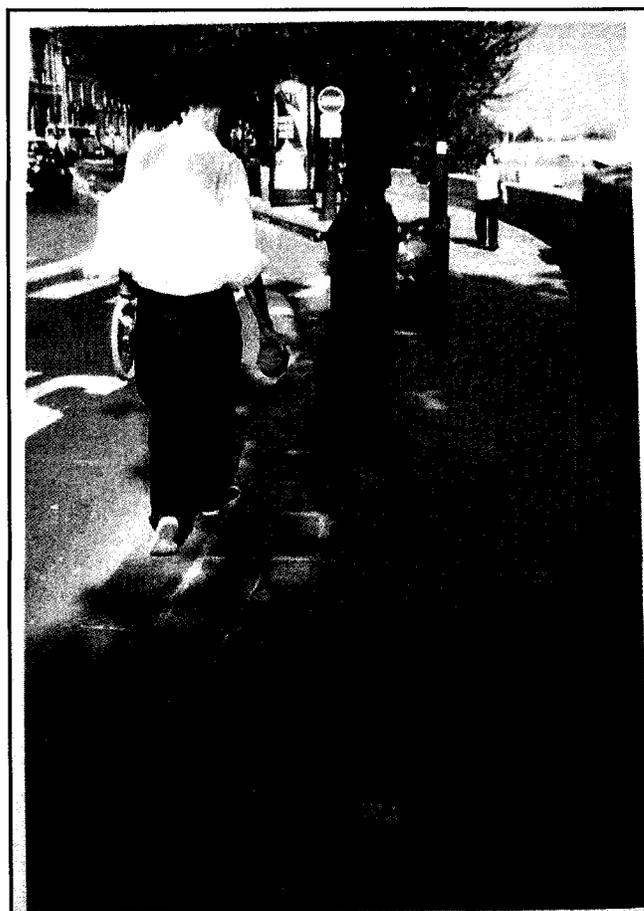


Figure 3.8

Francis Alÿs Postcard from *The Leak*, Paris, October 2003.

Francis Alÿs
The Leak, Paris, octobre 2003

"Partez du Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris et descendez vers la Seine... passez rive gauche par le pont de l'Alma... vous longez vers l'est le quai d'Orsay jusqu'au boulevard Saint Germain... prenez le boulevard et continuez jusqu'à croiser la rue de l'École de Médecine à droite... marchez 200 m et le Couvent des Cordeliers se trouve à votre main droite, au numéro 15."

Photo : Olivier Bello

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

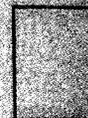


Figure 3.9

Francis Alÿs Postcard from *El Colector*, 1991-92.

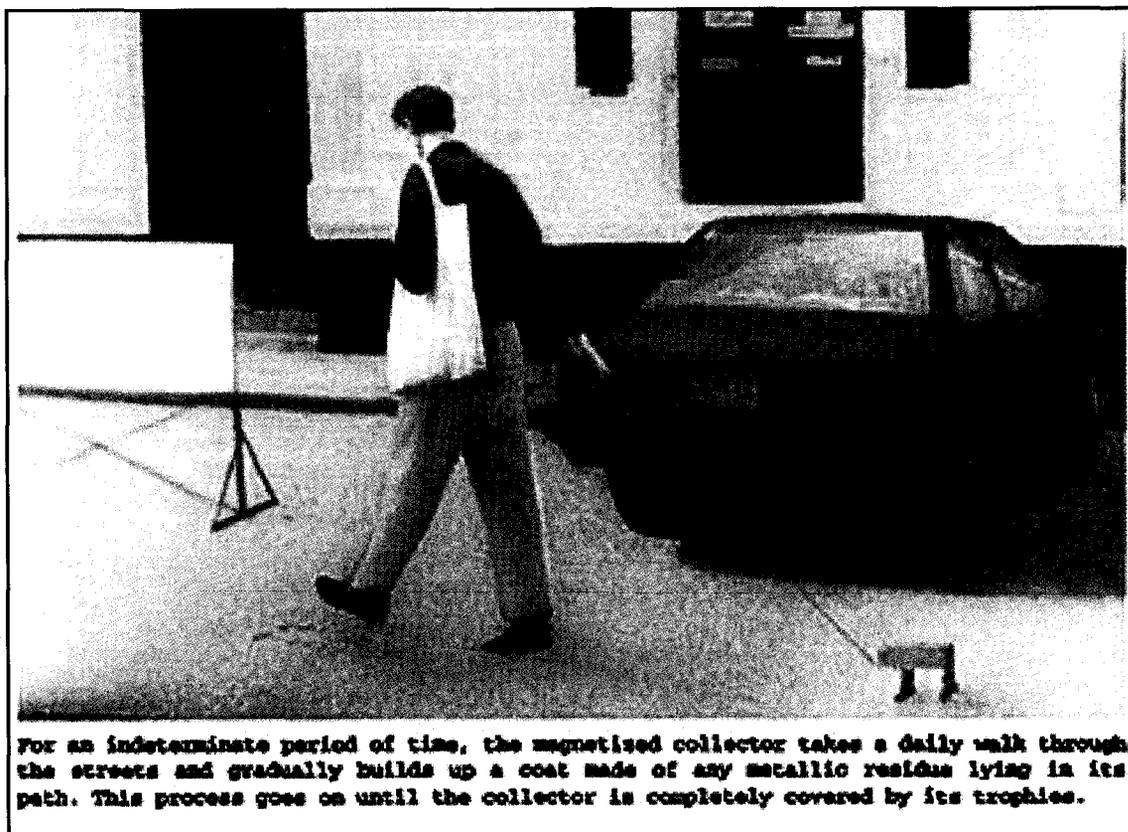
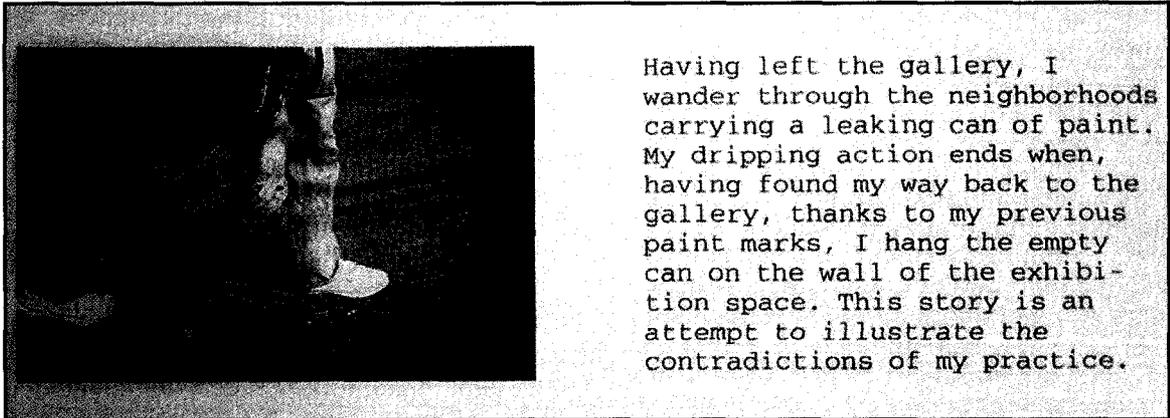


Figure 3.10

Francis Alÿs Postcard from *The Leak*, 1995.



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