

The Architect-Walker: Manifesto and Manifestations

Wrights & Sites

In 2005, Wrights & Sites produced *A Manifesto for a New Walking Culture*, which was first performed at the sixth Walk21 conference in Zürich and has since been published in *Performance Research* and in Nicolas Whybrow's anthology, *Performance and the Contemporary City*. In 2013, we are considering the ways in which that 'walking culture' contributes to, or might contribute to architecture. When does the walker become an architect and conversely, when does architecture go on a walk?

This paper for four voices, written for the *On Walking* conference (University of Sunderland and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, June 2013), draws on our own experiments with walking and architecture (e.g. *mis-guided*, BBI Festival, 2008; *Everything you need to build a town is here*, Wonders of Weston, 2010; *Ambulant Architectures*, Sideways Itinerant Festival, 2012), as well as referencing the convergence of walking and architecture by other artists, architects and walkers.

Formed in Exeter, 1997, Wrights & Sites are four artist-researchers (Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, Phil Smith and Cathy Turner) whose work is focused on peoples' relationships to places, cities and walking. We employ disrupted walking strategies as tools for playful debate, collaboration, intervention and spatial meaning-making.

www.mis-guide.com



PHIL: Ambulant architecture is the increase in the amount of space through which the walking people can move without leaving a trace, without becoming part of the spectacle, without falling under surveillance. In the space between secrets and images, it could be imaginary or composed of vibrant matter; occasionally, stuff with a mini-monumentality, even. Whatever it is, it is made by walkers and not by architects. It is best constructed from junk or ruins (from which we will build the future, or not at all). That's all I know and I made most of that up; so ambulant architecture may not have much authority or much to do with it; more about gaps than things; architectures to carry in your pocket, jemmies for widening openings – our consultants will be burglars.



STEPHEN: Everyone will tell you I am Nicolas Galeazzi. That is correct. From the very beginning of my career I class myself an architect-walker. Unannounced, I scatter enigmatic human-scale boxes about the place, neutral in colour and vague in design, with openings and protuberances for you to negotiate as you see fit. 'Raw, public and for use'. Places for the homeless to rest their feet. A provocation for the physically bold to drag them across the city.



SIMON: We might think of a manifesto as something that creates a structure or architecture for generating thoughts, ideas and images that are both conceptual and capable of being physically realized. Could such a manifesto be harnessed to build a city? Invite your neighbours to carry a chair each from their houses and in procession, walk together down your road. Stop at mutually agreed resting points and having sat down, talk about the new views you are all getting of this familiar street.



STEPHEN: Everyone will tell you I am Christian Hasucha. That is correct. My work is completely archipedal. *The Island* is a proposition. An opportunity to form a point of view, from a point of view, above the usual hustle and bustle of the city. Strangely private and safe. Rentable on a short-term basis. For a protest. Or a dance. Somewhere to occupy and to restage the winning goal of a major international football competition. Whatever.



CATHY: 'If you have ever looked out in the early morning and seen a city fill up with snow, you will know that the first walker changes everything' (Wrights & Sites 2006: 61). We will consider this change as a form of laboratory construction.



PHIL: Let's add new trip hazards to the High Street, particularly around adverts and window displays – steep inclines, pedestrian chicanes on wheels, camouflaged plinths, crazy golf courses on which the ball is played with the feet.



PHIL: We could temporarily install checkpoints – with guards, documentation, and flags in the livery of Tesco, Shell, HSBC... borders of actual sovereignty.



SIMON: In Public Spaces, particularly phantom, deserted zones, walk the shape of demolished, invisible or unrealized buildings. When the buildings' shape and form becomes clear to you, enter the space it suggests. Phone some friends and invite them to meet you there.



PHIL: A British businessman is serving a long prison sentence for selling dowsing rods with no relevant detection mechanics as £30,000 bomb detectors. But they do work – as ideomotors – encouraging users to engage their intuitive knowledge and pick up on cues. Why not carry a non-rational hypersensitizer for detecting ideology, spectacle, subterranean fear or anything else?



SIMON: Walk the city or town, touching its skin, sensing the pulse of its veins and nerve endings. Sense the thriving zones, the decaying zones, the dead zones, the invisible spaces beneath your feet. If a place is sick, what could you do to change its conditions or symptoms?



PHIL: The collapse of Western public finances is turning some public spaces from parade grounds into something more provocative and uneven; embrace their uncertainty.



STEPHEN: Everyone will tell you I am Robert Walker. That is correct. Walker by name, architect by trade. With my archipedometer in my hand I work happily and with confidence. My stereo viewers facilitate access to past, present and potential future architectures in triple vision as you roam the city – collapsing time and space - reviving ghosts and offering 3D previews of what's to come. The future lies with archipedomology.



CATHY: A makeshift, 'Monument to Freedom' was built on the first anniversary of the October Revolution. A box-like structure, it was built over and deliberately concealed St Petersburg's equestrian statue of Tsar Alexander III. Shklovsky writes of the street urchins who used to run from the police, crawling under the

monument to hide in the space 'between the Tsar and the revolution'. Seek out, create and occupy liminal spaces, neither one thing nor another.



SIMON: 'In a park or open space... walk the dimensions of your body' (Wrights & Sites 2006: 30). Members of the public drew the shape of the outline of their bodies with string. The lengths of string were joined together so that the line of their total outlines stretched from the ICA down Pall Mall and through Admiralty Arch.



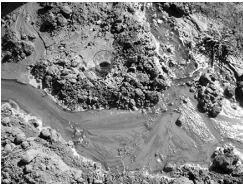
SIMON: Walk through any environment on a reconnaissance drift with a specialists in any field (architecture, psychology, choreography, ornithology) discussing ways of experiencing, re-imagining and planning a future habitat.



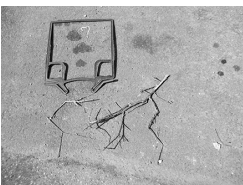
SIMON: The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude (Auge 1995: 103). A chosen location behind a new build is like a blank canvas waiting to be disrupted by natures' tendrils or by drunken graffiti. I chose to intervene by holding a conversation with the space between buildings: Call, Sing or Proclaim into the blank spaces behind new shops or offices, or into the air vents or underground car parks. Take note of the echoes or resonance of your voices as you paint the voids with sound. Hello Empty Space.



STEPHEN: I was almost afraid without knowing the cause. Into my head came the idea of amusing myself by taking 260,000 steps, then building my new home. This I did: and very boring it was too.



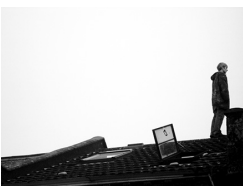
SIMON: Teaching in Zambia: In 1992, in the city of Ndola, I began walking to work at the side of potholed roads in a place where white expatriates are rarely seen on foot. I was often interrupted with offers of lifts by car drivers worried about my safety or mosquitos or sunlight or mud. Walk through any city, conscious that the paving stones and tarmac are only a thin skin over a planet pulsing with deep oceans, subterranean rivers, shifting tectonic plates and molten rock.



PHIL: Tiny houses for ghosts would make a change.



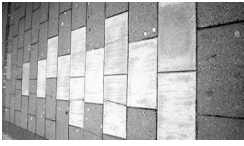
CATHY: Sophie Nield has written: 'The territory "occupied" by the demonstration is not, for the duration of the event, the space of power. Neither is it exclusively the space of resistance. The event itself is a battle between these two spaces...' (Nield 2006:60).



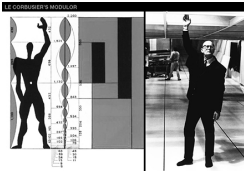
CATHY: Every day, rehearse the experience of standing outside the institutions you participate in. Breathe in that outside air and if you return, keep the window open.



CATHY: Hold a carnation in your hands and go to the place of protest. When the police come with water spray and rubber bullets, throw your carnations into the air. Make the square red with them.



SIMON: For the first time I recently pushed my ageing dad in a wheel chair. Suddenly the street where he lives is different. The pavement is brutal, uneven, grinding at his failing skeleton.



STEPHEN: Why attack Le Corbusier? He may be as miserable as we are.



PHIL: Carry a small bell for ringing on the hour and this might help restore public time to the streets. Write a novel in graffiti across an entire city. Push a hauntological barrel organ. Launch love drones. Carry imaginary image-projectors for disappearing the spectacle.



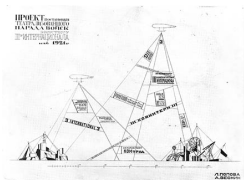
PHIL: Leave a fragile object at the city's rowdiest site; each morning, replace it if it has been damaged, destroyed or stolen. Make exploding adhesive-dipped screens that leave thousands of fragments of their final image across the city's surfaces. Build a demagogue's pulpit - with steps, loud hailer and a huge distorting lens where their eyes will be.



CATHY: Utopia: Important that we make it up as we go along. A Mis-Guide to Nowhere could be useful.



PHIL: In the US, the air force closes stretches of freeway and drives a full sized model of their largest aircraft along them to ensure that these roads can be used as runways. Any air force dropping any bomb should be forced to drag such models in parades of shame.



CATHY: The set designed by Alexander Vesnin and Lyubov Popova for a mass action in Moscow 1921 would have meant the performers would walk, march or somersault from 'The Citadel of Capitalism' to 'The City of the Future'. The audience, presumably, would follow this transition. Build in miniature your own spaces of dread and desire, enact the movement between the two.



SIMON: Ambulant Architectures, Sideways Festival, Belgium, 2012: BOAT. I proposed walking with a portable Boat structure. Whilst walking with this object I looked for all constructions that might take to the water. I placed this architectural object in rain puddles, by ponds or on riverbanks... Walk by the waterways of a city. Imagine a city that could float as sea levels rise. As an ambulant architecture, play with this small shelter and make note of other forms that it suggests as you *float* it from place to place.



STEPHEN: In order to build this house 840 times in succession, it would be advisable to prepare oneself beforehand, in the deepest silence by serious immobilities.



SIMON: In a group and in bright sunlight carry sticks and timbers that cast shadows on the ground. Only pay attention to the shadows you are casting. Combine the shadows until some shape occurs that suggests an extraordinary building. Look at the constructed shadows then look at the formation of people carrying their building materials.



SIMON: In *The Shape of Time*, George Kubler writes 'Like crustacea, we depend for survival on an outer skeleton, upon a shell of historic cities and houses filled with things belonging to portions of the past.' In an unstable world, where such outer skeletons and protective shells are no longer presumed to be the human rights of many, this Ambulant Architecture enquiry is a serious but playful reflection upon the necessities and luxuries of shelters from the storm.



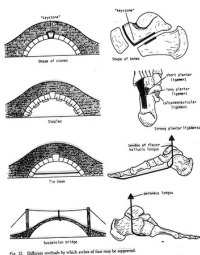
CATHY: On June 17th, 2013, performance artist Erdem Gunduz registered a protest against police violence in Istanbul by stopping and standing still, without speaking for five hours. He was joined by others and this form of protest spread across the country. Some of those standing read books, while the police also read books from a mobile library, like the libraries Dee Heddon and Misha Myers have created. How would you stock a walking library for a standing protest?



STEPHEN: When I was young, I was told: 'Form follows function'. What is the form, where play is the function?



PHIL: Burdens will be available for hire from an 'All Rent Is Theft' shop. I personally intend to chalk temporary landing strips to facilitate inter-planetary dogging. To confuse the future we could all bury egalitarian objects in the foundations of important buildings.



STEPHEN: Here is the exact timetable of my daily life as an Architect-Walker. Get up: 7:18am; lay foundations with Francesco Careri 10:23 to 11:47am. Take lunch: 12:11pm; leave table at 12:14pm. Optional and social activities in the soft-edged city with Jan Gehl: 1:19 to 2:53pm. Intervene with the Office for Subversive Architecture: 3:12 to 4:07pm. Various activities (exploring neglected or superfluous spaces, erecting temporary and portable dwellings, reconfiguring detritus, etc.): 4:21 to 6:47pm. Dinner is served at 7:16 and ends at 7:20pm. Then let off steam with Diller + Scofidio 8:09 to 9:49pm. I go to bed regularly at 10:37pm. Once a week on Tuesdays I wake with a start at 3:19am as walker-composer Erik Satie stumbles in after his 10km trek home.



PHIL: Cubicles of silence for reflection and interiority. Extra spirals. Portable wormholes. Daydreaming areas devoid of commercial potential. Floating eyes taking self-contained pleasure in erotic looking. Hobo chalking. Snowglobes of favellas and closed car plants. Model daleks to put on empty plinths. Three dimensional wooden maps filled with woodworm. Handy perspex containers filled with the waste products of cosmetic surgery for sinking into the floors of beauty parlours. Hubs for turning everything around. Frames for shaping encounters which are reshaped by those encounters. Curtains that switch between exposing unfamiliar things and returning us to the everyday. Subjective temples drawn in

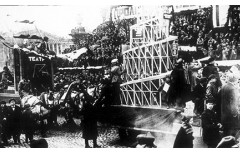
chalk for a single ritual and then promptly rubbed out.



CATHY: The agit-stands of Gustav Klutsis were simple wooden constructions that could be set up on a street corner to share a political message. Somehow their spryly prancing red and black lines suggest something animate, something dynamic. Their texts served Soviet propaganda, but their shapes suggest something else - something that might wriggle into another form, or fold itself up and take itself elsewhere. Some of them are also temporary stages. The soapbox had become something enigmatic and potentially mischievous. Hobby-horses for walker-architects to ride.



STEPHEN: I practice architect-walker-ship best on the physical borders of the land and sea, constrained by a rule that keeps me in visual contact with the material of the constantly shifting shoreline – on a narrow path where Coastal Defense Strategists weigh up the options every few miles of ‘holding the line’, ‘doing nothing’ or ‘retreating’. Town planners and architects hold no sway in the West Wales coastal village of Borth, for example. The guerrillas have won the war there. No long-term strategies teased out in council committee rooms – only short-term, localised tactics spreading quietly across the fences of back gardens and public rights of way until they've conquered a whole settlement. The fragile, or provisional, architectures of the seaside dwellers are interim – like the palimpsest of the shoreline. The coastal strategy for end-of-the-line Borth is to hold the line, but either side the coastal planners are preparing for retreat. What future the unwanted ‘zoo animals and exotic pets’ of the village’s Animalarium? Release them – let Nilly, the Eurasian Lynx, fashion her own landscape behind the dunes.



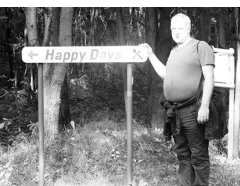
CATHY: Tatlin's tower, projected as 400 metres tall, was only ever built as a wooden model. It was enough. It was enough to demonstrate a fantasy-construction that prompted a skeletal, black and red progeny of stands, plinths, kiosks, stages. Show other people your models, sketches, sculptural provocations, portable questions. Plant them like seeds.



PHIL: Once you grasp the idea that even under contemporary conditions there's plenty out there to be messed with – mapping the globalised economy on supermarket floors with jars of mango chutney and bags of pasta – then more and more opportunities for ambulant and other guerrilla architectures will reveal themselves; and just as mythogeography reveals the means to make almost any journey a spontaneous creation, so ambulant architecture offers you the means to appropriate fine textures and giant complexes as your props; like stage properties, common properties; remaking sclerotic thought-in-fabric-form as your own philosophies; by subtle physical changes, amateur repairs, adding obstacles to social logic, learning how to be in the wrong place, making new situations dramaturgically. Build your own desires and happiness. Ignoring the view and commandeering the homes of the rich and the offices of the powerful as your own personal backdrops.



CATHY: The protests in Turkey began as resistance to proposals to bulldoze Gezi park in Istanbul. A campaign for public space, a campaign for green space. A manifesto within a manifesto follows: 1. We want the park to stay as a park. 2. We want the arrested protesters to be released. 3. We want the police aggression to stop. 4. We want our right to demonstrate and protest in public areas respected.



STEPHEN: Ambulant architectures are mere folly.



STEPHEN: The extensive network of Belgium's walking paths are fabricated from the rubble of the country's demolition industry. Knock holes in your homes and workplaces in order to lay the foundations for new desire paths.



CATHY: After a long conversation about participation - 'Something quieter', I said. 'I'm after something quieter'. Walking might be walking away. Walking across borders. Walking out. A line made by walking.



STEPHEN: I have long subscribed to the Journal of Ambulant Architecture. I carry a set of idealised, geometric building blocks to comment on the past and model possible futures through the lens of planner, or mathematician, or even child. I carry a portable plinth, a porous boat and lightless beacons. I walk with canvas strapped to the bottom of my shoes, and am accompanied by a multimedia donkey. My Internet Service Provider has always told me to hang up my boots. Part of his advice runs 'Settle down, my dear chap. If you don't someone else will.'



SIMON: Build a house of clay. Embed flower seeds in the clay. The clay dries. People live in this house. Let the house absorb the seasons. The house dissolves. People move on. Flowers grow.