

INTRODUCTION

READING THE STREET

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Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets.

Jacobs, 1961: 39

Streets, as Jane Jacobs reminds us, have always held a particular fascination for those interested in the city. Streets are the terrain of social encounters and political protest, sites of domination and resistance, places of pleasure and anxiety. Located at the intersection of several academic disciplines, the street is also the focus of many theoretical debates about the city concerning modern and, more recently, postmodern urbanism. For modernists the street is a space 'from which to get from A to B, rather than a place to live in', displacing the street 'from lifeworld to system', (Lash and Friedmann, 1992: 10); for postmodernists, the street is a place designed to foster, and complement new urban lifestyles, reclaiming the street from system to lifeworld. Exploring these and many other readings of the street, this volume subjects the street to sustained critical scrutiny. An international, cross-disciplinary set of essays, it explores how streets as specific, local landscapes manifest broader social and cultural processes, establishing the strategic importance of the street to wider theoretical questions about the interplay between society and space. What, for example, does the design of streets reveal about dominant ideas in politics and planning? How are social identities and social practices shaped by people's experiences of the street? Does increasing social control signal the end of the street as a 'public' space? These are some of the key issues addressed by contributions to this volume. The street which 'has occupied a cherished place in the lexicon of urbanism' (Keith, 1995: 297) is, of course, no stranger to such scrutiny. Nevertheless, much of our current understanding of the meaning and significance of the street appears dominated by a small number of studies of very particular streets.

URBANISM AND THE STREET: TAKING THE 'GRAND TOUR'

Look through two volumes reprinting what are considered to be some of the most significant contributions to understanding urbanism this century (Kasnitz, 1995; Le Gates and Stout, 1996), and you will find that each offers a very similar 'tour' of city streets. In the company of Walter Benjamin, Le Corbusier, Jane Jacobs and Mike Davis, the reader is taken down broad boulevards and high speed expressways, through communities where residents participate in daily 'street ballets' and on to 'mean streets' where an underclass fight for survival. Although the work of these urban commentators clearly represents only a fraction of what has been written about the street, it is to these classics that many other influential accounts of the city and its streets, as well as many of the contributors to this volume, so often refer (see, for example, Berman, 1983; Sennett, 1990; Sudjic, 1992; Young, 1990). It will therefore be useful to begin by taking the 'grand tour' of city streets before looking in more detail at the individual chapters.

The tour begins in mid- to late nineteenth century Paris with Walter Benjamin's observations on that self-styled 'artist in demolition', Baron Haussmann and his 'constructive destruction' of the city to make way for the straight, wide boulevards of his new urban circulatory system (Benjamin, 1995). The surgical overtones of the phrase 'circulatory system' are not unimportant. As Ellin (1997a) notes, Haussmann viewed the city as a sick organism with his task that of the surgeon cutting out infected areas and opening up clogged arteries. According to Benjamin, however, these surgical metaphors should not obscure 'The true purpose of Haussmann's work', namely to 'secure the city against civil war' (Benjamin, 1995: 54). While it is certainly true that the breadth of streets made the erection of barricades difficult and their straightness provided infantry with a long line of fire, Benjamin's singular reading of Haussmann's boulevards misses other significant implications of their construction. The boulevards had an important economic function, helping to quicken the pace of commerce; socially, large numbers of the working-classes were employed in their construction while the routes of the boulevards caused some dispersion and displacement of working class communities; and, symbolically, they provided an unequivocal demonstration of the power of the state to shape the urban landscape in the interests of the bourgeoisie (see Ellin, 1997a: 18-19).

Although the physical legacy of Haussmann's work was enormously important, so too was its clear articulation of that modernist understanding of the street, that 'Streets had been for walking to work or shops and for socialising. Now they were primarily for movement' (Ellin, 1997a: 13). This was to be strongly endorsed by the architect and planner Le Corbusier and it is the streets of his planned 'Contemporary City' of 1922 that provide the next stop on this 'grand tour'. To be built on the Right Bank of the Seine, this was to be a city of high towers, open spaces and new kinds of streets. According to Le Corbusier, 'The corridor street "should be tolerated no longer" because it is full of noise and dust, deprived of light and so 'poisons the houses that border it' (Le Corbusier, 1996: 371). Although this use of a medical metaphor harks back to Haussmann, it is the city as machine which provides the

central metaphor of Le Corbusier's urban vision. The corridor street must be replaced by a new type of street which will be 'a machine for traffic' (quoted in Berman, 1983: 167) used exclusively by fast-moving mechanical vehicles, and free from pedestrians and building fronts. Although this would mean the abolition of the street and with it the crowd and many other activities, for Le Corbusier it was a price worth paying. Capturing the modernist spirit, he declared, 'A city made for speed is made for success' (Le Corbusier, 1996: 375). Unfortunately for Le Corbusier, his Contemporary City proposal won him few planning commissions and it was not until the construction of Brasilia in 1960 which drew strongly on his ideas that the implications of a city without streets became apparent. In place of the street, Brasilia substitutes high-speed avenues and residential cul-de-sacs, a configuration which doesn't simply erase a particular type of space (the street) but also undermines particular forms of social and political life. As Holston's (1989) fascinating study reveals, Brasilia is a city without 'street corner societies' where people might gossip informally and exchange information because there are no street corners and people therefore rely more on domestic and private spaces for social interaction. And Brasilia is a city without crowds because by abolishing the street the planners effectively destroyed those public spaces where people might meet to express and debate their political beliefs and through which the public sphere of civic life is both represented and constituted (Holston, 1989: 103). If, as many have claimed, 'revolutions entail a taking to the streets' (Mitchell, 1995: 124; but see also Berman, 1983, 1986), Le Corbusier's ideas represent a neat counter-revolutionary strategy.

Next stop on the tour is 1960s New York and the streets of Greenwich Village from where Jane Jacobs (1961; see also Jacobs, 1995, 1996) made her vehement attack on the Corbusian tradition of expressways and tower blocks. Le Corbusier had visited New York some thirty years earlier, delighting in the simplicity with which it was possible to navigate the city because of the regular street grid: 'the streets are at right angles to each other and the mind is liberated' (Le Corbusier, 1995: 100). However, he went on to observe 'an urban no man's land made up of miserable low buildings in poor streets of dirty red brick' and it was precisely from such streets that 'the great refutation of his model of urbanism would be launched' (Kasnitz, 1995: 93). Jacobs describes in vivid detail the rhythms of daily life on Hudson Street in Greenwich Village, arguing that streets play a central role in establishing urban communal life and, in particular, in promoting safety. To achieve this, however, it is essential for the street to be 'multifunctional', not the exclusive domain of traffic, and for there to be 'eyes on the street' belonging to local inhabitants and traders who are able to provide neighbourhood surveillance of activities taking place on the street.

While the contrast with Le Corbusier's vision of the street could hardly be greater, the almost pastoral image of self-regulating street life that Jacobs conjures up (Berman, 1983: 324) also stands in stark contrast to the final destination on this 'grand tour', the streets of contemporary Los Angeles. Displaying 'the gritty street-wise pluck of the truck driver-*flâneur*' (Soja, 1997: 27), Mike Davis guides us round the 'Mean Streets' of LA, pointing out the 'bumproof' benches, sprinkler systems

and regular police patrols as evidence of the city's 'relentless struggle to make the streets as unliveable as possible for the homeless and the poor' (Davis, 1995: 362; see also Davis, 1996). Although Davis's account has been criticised by those who feel his 'overheated rhetorical excesses often seem to overwhelm rational discourse' (Legates and Stout, 1996: 158), his disturbing images of 'the inhumanity of Downtown streets' (ibid.: 365; Soja calls them 'sadistic street environments', 1997: 27), do highlight two important and related themes of postmodern urbanism. First, these images underline the way in which 'form follows fear' in the contemporary urban environment (see Ellin, 1996, 1997b); secondly, they point to an increasing erosion of democratic public space (see Sorkin, 1992; Christopherson, 1994).

The importance of this tour of city streets in terms of providing wider insights into urban society should not be underestimated. These studies can be used individually and collectively to illustrate how streets are sites and signs of discipline and disorder, symptoms and symbols of modern and postmodern urbanism. Further, these studies show how streets can be viewed as both 'representations of space', the discursively constructed spaces of planners and architects, and 'spaces of representation', the spaces of everyday life of 'inhabitants' and 'users' (Lefebvre, 1991). Nevertheless, this 'grand tour' clearly has many limitations. Most obviously it is tied to an extremely narrow range of historical, geographical and cultural settings and therefore inevitably fails to engage with the heterogeneity of streets located in different times and spaces. More significantly, this 'grand tour' relies on limited methodological positions. At one extreme is Le Corbusier who sees the street (to borrow Lefebvre's phrase), 'from on high and from afar' (quoted in Gregory, 1994: 404); at the other, the accounts of both Jacobs and Davis involve the 'epistemological privileging of the experience of the *flâneur*', the street-wandering free agent of everyday life' (Soja, 1997: 21). These empirical and methodological limitations, in turn, inevitably circumscribe the theoretical contribution of the 'grand tour'. While the descriptions and analysis of the different streets on the tour can, as suggested above, be used in broader theoretical debates about society and space, individually these accounts are only weakly informed by specific theoretical ideas. It is against this background that the essays in this volume attempt to enrich our understanding of the street.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAYS

The contributions are grouped around three broad themes: 'Planning and Design', 'Social Identities and Social Practices', and 'Control and Resistance'. The first section, 'Planning and Design', establishes the importance of seeing streets as environments constructed by knowledgeable agents situated within particular social, political and economic settings. Streetscapes are very much 'a synthesis of charisma and context, a text which may be read to reveal the force of dominant ideas and prevailing practices as well as the idiosyncrasies of a particular author' (Ley and Duncan, 1993: 329; see also Appleyard, 1981; Çelik, Favro and Ingersoll, 1994, and Moudon, 1991). Comprising four essays organised in chronological order, the first by David Atkinson examines the restructuring of Rome under the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini,

focusing on the creation of streets which would both express the ideological agenda and stage the rituals and performances of fascism. Of these streets, the *Via del Mare* (the Road to the Sea) begun in 1926 was one of the most ambitious projects and Atkinson's study provides intriguing insights into the making of totalitarian urban space. Standing in stark contrast to this broad, monumental boulevard constructed in central Rome are the narrow, winding streets of Pollok, a municipal suburb to the south of Glasgow begun in the 1930s. Built to take those displaced by redevelopment in Glasgow's inner city, the design of Pollok, as Gerry Mooney's chapter reveals, drew inspiration from the representations of space produced by the Garden City movement and this is partly expressed in the network of broad, tree-lined streets and narrow, curving roads laid out in sympathy with the local, undulating topography. One of the central themes of Mooney's chapter, however, is that streetscapes rarely reflect a straightforward application of some visionary model (in Pollok the pressures to house more and more people lead to the construction of four- and five-storey tenements on streets originally designed for two-storey cottages) and this theme is reworked in John Gold's chapter in the context of modernist plans to replace the traditional street. The impulse for many of these plans came from an acute sense that the street had become a 'battleground' between competing and conflicting uses: motor vehicles and pedestrians, local and through traffic, commercial and private activities. Although Le Corbusier had vigorously attacked the waste and inefficiency of the *rue corridor*, Gold shows that there remained an important gap between the visions of Le Corbusier (and other modernists) and blueprints for street planning. 'The boulevard might be dead', Gold observes, 'but the urban expressway was yet to arrive'. By considering the work of the British Modern Movement in the 1940s, Gold illustrates how this gap between vision and practice provided scope for considerable experimentation with multi-level, functionally defined circulation systems. Finally, in this first section, Richard Levy provides a glimpse of how current Computer Aided Design (CAD) technology is being used to transform the planning and design of streets. Using animations and virtual reality it is now possible to simulate the pedestrian experience of a planned streetscape, allowing people to see its impact, quite literally, on their view of the environment. Impressive though this technology is, arguably its greatest potential impact is in democratising the design process by allowing anyone with access to a television or computer screen a simulated experience of plans proposed for their community.

In Part II, the focus shifts from the making of streetscapes to explore the meaning and significance of the street in relation to social identities and social practices. By focusing on these themes, the essays in this section contribute to wider debates which question the view that as public spaces streets are universally accessible to a civic public, and provide evidence of how streets can be an active medium through which social identities are created and contested (see Ruddick, 1996: 133–5). Jane Rendell's vivid account of the male Rambler on the streets of early nineteenth-century London offers, at one level, an intriguing series of observations on the social, cultural and economic geography of the city, as the Rambler takes to the street and guides the reader between sites of leisure and pleasure (theatres, opera houses and parks),

consumption and exchange (the main shopping streets, private arcades and bazaars). But these urban explorations have a wider theoretical relevance. The movement of the male Rambler through the streets reveals much about the gendering of urban space and his mobility suggests that the relationships between gender and space are more complex than established ideas concerning the 'separate spheres' of the male public realm and the female private realm. In contrast to the mobility of the Rambler is the more restricted movement of those with disabilities examined by Brendan Gleeson. Piecing together a fragmentary historical record, Gleeson reveals the strategic importance of the street in the lives of disabled people in colonial Melbourne. Their inability to meet the mobility requirements of industrial capitalism, with its separation of work and home, combined with the desire of those in authority to confine the disabled to the workhouse, asylum or jail, meant that the very presence of disabled people on the streets, as beggars or street-traders, represented a minor victory for those struggling for some sense of inclusion in an exclusionary society. The disabled also feature in the following chapter as one group among the diverse array of people who make up the homeless living on the streets of contemporary Britain and North America. Linking together some of the reasons for homelessness, Gerald Daly unravels a complex chain of events and decisions in which the personal becomes enmeshed in the political and the economic, the local in the global. Daly shows how, once on the street, the homeless enter into the shared experience of a harsh and brutal urban environment in which their movements around the city are mapped out by the locations of hostels, missions, drop-in centres and soup kitchens.

Running throughout Daly's chapter is a strong sense of the physicality of life on the street, a theme developed by David Bell and Jon Binnie in a rather different context in their account of the 'erotics of the street'. Informed by the writings of de Certeau (1984), they argue that walking, looking and being looked at on the street are fundamental aspects of the formation of 'queer consciousness'. By juxtaposing two fictional accounts of urban queer sexualities, they show how the streets can provide sites for very different experiences. In Andrew Holleran's *Dance from the Dance*, the streets are to be cruised in search of love whereas in Stewart Home's *No Pity* the streets are settings of violence and acts of revolutionary agitation. In making sense of these different experiences of the street, it's not simply their different geographical settings that matter (Holleran's novel is set in Manhattan, Home's in London) but also their temporal context, for Holleran's romantic vision predates AIDS while Home's 'nihilistic brutalism' is set firmly within the time of AIDS. The interrelationships between masculinities and the street are also examined by Aitken and Lukinbeal's analysis of the streetscapes found in the films of Terry Gilliam. In film, Aitken and Lukinbeal argue, urban streets often act as 'visual signifiers' of the loss of innocence and the alienation of city life, with the 'mean streets' of the city commonly juxtaposed with the escapism associated with life on the 'open road'. In Gilliam's movies, however, where the streetscapes range from fascist monumentalism to medieval citadels, characters are frequently trapped by and absorbed into the street with little prospect of such escape to the 'open road'. Aitken and Lukinbeal use scenes from Gilliam's films to investigate how street myths, masculinities and representations of

hysteria contrive what they call a *mise-en-scène*, a 'continuous space ... a positioning and positional movement' for multiple male masculinities.

In the next chapter, the focus broadens as David Crouch explores the significance of the street as 'an everyday site of geographical knowledge and leisure practice'. From walking to a football match to going to play in a park or tend an allotment, he shows how people make sense of their lives by way of the street, revealing the rituals and relationships, practices and representations, which are played out routinely on the street. In the following chapter, Peter Jackson is also concerned with the everyday experience of the street but the focus is narrower as he explores the theme of 'domesticating space' in the context of two shopping malls in north London. In contrast to the perceived incivility of city streets, the privately owned and managed but publicly accessible spaces of the mall are environments which allow for the regulation of difference and the promotion of 'the virtues of familiarity'. Such environments don't, however, generate a singular experience of 'consumer citizenship'. Rather, differences of ethnicity, class, age, and gender all mediate and complicate the meanings people attach to the mall. Further, Jackson's chapter alerts us to the dangers of domesticating the street. Purifying and privatising spaces to enhance the consumption experience for some comes at a price of social exclusion and a sense of increasing inequality for others.

The consumption experience is given a more literal twist in Gill Valentine's chapter which examines the interrelationships between food and the street. Historically, she argues, social expectations about eating have determined that the street should be viewed as a cultured space where people exercise self-restraint in the face of natural urges to eat; a public space where intimate, 'private' bodily matters such as eating are not on display; and an ordered space, where the mess of consumption is kept out of sight. Attitudes to eating in the street are changing, however, and Valentine's research indicates many of the past taboos about eating on the street are being broken down. Changing work practices, the growth in canteen style fast foods in schools and on the high street, and the anonymity of contemporary urban life have all contributed to developing more informal social codes of eating. 'Grazing' on city streets thus now appears to be a more accepted form of behaviour than in the past and in turn, Valentine suggests, the street is becoming a more informal and more democratic space, less regulated by codes of 'civility', 'privacy' and 'order'. Of course, taboos about eating on the street are culturally as well as historically specific and the final chapter in this section, Tim Edensor's 'The Culture of the Indian Street', rightly requires us to acknowledge the cultural specificity of the regulated qualities of Western street life. He explores many of the themes already encountered in the book – social practices, movement, regulation, sensual experience – but in the context of an idealised Indian street, destabilising many taken-for-granted notions about the ordering of street practices in the West. This, too, has a wider theoretical relevance for, as Edensor shows, it unmasks the ethnocentricity of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, Foucault's heterotopia and de Certeau's walks in the city.

In Part III, 'Control and Resistance', the four essays pick up on themes of regulation, ordering and the surveillance of street life that have surfaced at various points

earlier in the book and address them in more detail. In the frontline of maintaining order on the street are the police, and Steve Herbert's rich ethnographic study of patrol officers in Los Angeles provides an interesting elaboration on Rubenstein's observation on the relationship between the street and police identity: 'For the patrolman [sic] the street is everything; if he loses that, he has surrendered his reason for being what he is' (Rubenstein, 1973: 166). Police efforts to claim sovereignty over the street are always subject to contestation and Herbert, by exploring an infamous 'anti-police' location', shows how attempts to maintain territorial control here are driven by a sense of moralistic fervour and a love of the physicality of the chase as the police try to insert state authority into everyday life on the street. This kind of policing, however, represents only one way of maintaining order on the street. Accounts charting the rise of the 'fortress city' (see, for example, Davis, 1990; Christopherson, 1994) illustrate that issues of security and control are now prominent themes in contemporary planning and urban design as 'form follows fear' in the postmodern city. As Loretta Lees observes in her chapter, there is an increasing use of war rhetoric by many urban analysts as they describe the 'embattled' public spaces of city streets and warn of the 'end of public space'. Although Lees' study of two gentrification projects in Vancouver does lend some support to this view it is, she argues, only part of the story. Alongside attempts at enhanced control in urban design are also concerns with promoting the diversity and vitality of the street, revealing a more complex and ambivalent relationship between gentrification and urban life than notions of the privatised streets of the fortress city allow. Nevertheless, as Nick Fyfe and Jon Bannister argue in their study of closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance on the streets of Glasgow, the use of public space CCTV (funded partly by private capital) is implicated in a subtle privatisation of public space as commercial imperatives increasingly define what is 'acceptable' behaviour on the street. This reflects broader processes linked to the economic and political restructuring of public space as attempts are made to create a 'downtown as mall'. As Jackson's earlier chapter indicated, however, there is a high price to be paid for such attempts at 'domesticating the street'. Drawing on the work of Sennett, Fyfe and Bannister suggest that purifying the street of disorder and difference may actually deprive people of the ability to handle conflict, leading to problems of violent over-reaction to any social disorder when it does arise. The final essay by Tim Cresswell connects up this theme of disorder on the street with that of resistance by examining the 'subversive scrawls' that appear at night on advertisements, signs and buildings in city streets. Focusing on 'billboard banditry' and the work of the Polish-Canadian artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, Cresswell argues that the intrusion of 'illegal' and unsanctioned texts and images onto the street is important politically because it creates new meanings and messages in public spaces which can destabilize the meanings and messages of officially sanctioned forms of discourse. More generally, however, these 'subversive scrawls' capture a creative tension, one that manifests itself in different forms throughout this book, between the street defined from 'above' as a space of order and discipline and the street as experienced from 'below' as a space of conflict and contestation.

No one volume on streets could hope to capture 'all their hectoring danger, their swirling confusion, and their muddled vitality' (Boddy, 1992, p.153) and this collection makes no claims to offering a comprehensive guide to 'images of the street'. Nevertheless, the essays, individually and collectively, clearly advance our understanding of the street beyond the limited empirical, methodological and theoretical horizons of the 'grand tour' described at the beginning of this introduction. This is reflected in sheer diversity of streets explored by the contributors, the range of methodological strategies and source materials used, and the connections made with different theoretical debates. Capturing the vitality, excitement and tensions of the street, this volume should enrich and extend our understanding of the making and meaning of a key urban space.

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