Step by Step

Everyday Walks
in a French Urban Housing Project

JEAN-FRANÇOIS AUGOYARD

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Contents

Itinerary

THIS WORK takes the *step* as its point of departure under a variety of headings.

It is dedicated, first of all, to a small number of inhabitants in a town that looks like many others. Their daily strolls, which we have "joined in mid-march," have taken us, little by little, along many detours and into the flurry of particular details of *ordinary life*. To the point of rambling. We wanted to learn how these inhabitants live their relationship to the spaces of their habitat. But their approaches have come to take over our own and have obliterated the abstract itinerary we had projected to follow. We wanted to *make them say* something, likening their spatial practices to one or another of the major routes that structure present-day familiarity with the city. Yet *step by step,* confidence in our own scientific knowledge has slackened. At the rhythm with which time itself is lived, our reductionist techniques have fallen by the wayside.

We shall simply attempt to state in the pages of the present volume, and with the hope of not betraying them too much, what the inhabitants are *expressing* by themselves, every day, in their most unremarkable forms of conduct. We thank them for this salutary change of scenery [*dépaysement*] which invites us to make three somewhat unusual steps in the field of scientific knowledge about the city: a side step, a step forward, perchance to take a plunge [*un pas à sauter*].

First, a side step in urban studies.

The "quality of life" theme is "in" today. After several decades of urban planning that were characterized by an increasing mastery of space in quantitative terms, the inhabitants have suddenly become an object of concern. It is asked how the "user" can come to live within

these new urban arrangements. One seeks to improve the living conditions of the "consumer" or the "constituent" [*l'"administré"*]. New techniques have been invented to soften the edges of planned spaces—for example, by promoting sociocultural activities and entertainments.

Yet the everyday problems intensive urban development generates are still being dealt with in one of two ways. Either such treatment is considered *after* the development and construction have been completed, and then one searches for remedies, or it is contemplated *before* the urbanization program is carried out, and then hypothetical data are taken into account via preconceived ways of using the urban space.

For both these approaches, it seems, the instantiated principle [*instance*] of the inhabitant or "user" can be dealt with only in the form of a content that "fills in," *after the fact,* an already laid-out and developed space. In its operational mode, urban planning in reality merely manipulates representations of use. Everyday time—which cannot enter into a construction parameter—becomes secondary, accidental, incidental.

But is not this omission itself of significance? Is there not a qualitative gap between lived practices and representations of these practices? Is everyday life to be reduced to a reproduction? Is its fate to go on repeating, blindly, the urgent imperatives dictated by the economic order and the ideological order? Or does it really have a productive and expressive capacity of its own?

The question could at least be posed for once. And, were it only for the time of the present volume, it might merit a side step, or an attempt to follow lived time as closely as possible, to look into what its own powers and abilities are, and to cast, from this point of view, a different glance upon the urban world.

Such an approach is in no way an easy one. It necessitates a *step forward* in the methods of qualitative sociology.

For a few years now, there has been a marked interest in qualitative analyses of urban life. What one now considers classical sociology—which was based on statistical data that allow one to offer an overall diagnosis before it is too late and to reveal the most general causes of a growing urban malaise—has perhaps even been criticized too rashly. Today, people talk a lot about a new sociology that would free itself from the *quantum*. A qualitative methodology is nevertheless still taking

its first steps, taking pains to distance itself from a search for necessary causes or from ethnological methods that abandon the exotic in order to return to the "endotic." Others, inspired by a more poetic model, attempt to describe, in first-person terms, the quality of lived space.

A step would be taken, were it granted that, on the one hand, everyday life is a fabric of ways of being (before being a set of second-order effects) and that, on the other, the modalities of lived experience belonging to each inhabitant do indeed participate in a community of meaning. Beyond the *I,* there is undoubtedly a *we,* which expresses itself in everydayness. Is a method of *modal analysis* possible in the case of urban sociology?

The present volume presents the concrete experiment we have undertaken. Because of this, however, the writing is inflected in two unusual ways. For, grasped in its lived quality, everyday life does not yield states of affairs, behaviors whose typological structure could be fixed in place. It gives us movements, *conducts*. The account we shall offer respects its evolutive or "fleeting" character. Following the *approach* we have taken over several years, each moment—and here each chapter—outstrips the previous one, correcting its errancies and adjusting its extrapolations. True, this makes the reading of the book all the more difficult. But this option, it has seemed to us, considerably reduces the gap [*l'écart*] between everyday life and our observational experience of it.

Moreover, does not every statement about everyday life that would fail to enter into its concrete particularities and singularities risk setting it too quickly and rigidly in the realm of the *represented* and, in this sense, also risk reduplicating the reductions currently imposed upon it via the production of planned space? Also, our study will hardly ever depart from a quite specific urban neighborhood that serves as an example. *Step by step,* it weaves together what we hope will be close ties between ambulatory practices unfolding in a concrete space-time and our analytic approach. May the reader therefore excuse us for our slow goings, procrastinations, and repetitions. The primary task of a modal analysis undoubtedly is to take into account such constant to-and-fro movements between the scattered pluralities of lived experience and the minimum unity required by speech.

The itinerary we are proposing will no doubt appear off-track and

puzzling [*déroutant*]. What interest could there possibly be in accounting for practices so unremarkable and familiar that they would seem to us to border on the innocuous, the insignificant? What contribution can such a sidelong approach—one that, from the outset, fails to take into account the certainties of today's scientific knowledge—make that would deepen our familiarity with urban life?

Such an invitation to vagabondage might be able to alter our mental attitude about urban phenomena. It prods us to *take a plunge,* to think everyday life through its own logic, to settle ourselves straightaway into the insignificant, the plural, the patchy. Ought not a philosophy of everyday life begin by making this deliberate leap [*écart*]?

A philosophy of the *remainder* is unlikely to be possible except through a break in the hierarchy of epistemological values. Such a philosophy implies that modality would not be merely an instrument of causality—that is to say, that the way in which one does things might appear as significant as the result of the action taken—and that one's style of expressing oneself might carry as much weight as what is signified (what is called "the signified") or what is expressed (what will be called "the expressed"). The urban world has reduced everyday life to a series of functional operations; that world conditions its needs and gives the code of its usages. In this world, everyday life retains possession only of its expressive or rhetorical dimension. And so as not to reduce this last power and ability of the urban dweller even further, must not our investigation summon up all its patience and must not our scientific knowledge give proof of a great flexibility, perhaps even accepting the overthrow of a few of its certainties?

I

Arteries, Impasses, Side Streets

The paths, the cuts that run invisibly along the route
Are our only route, for we who speak in order to live, who
Sleep, without growing drowsy, by the wayside.

—René Char

Arteries

Who has not, one day or another, had the distinct impression that he has been pretty much banished from, dispossessed of, the city he inhabits? And who has not, upon the accidental irruption of such an impression, glimpsed that everyday habits get lost in the details and, indeed, that these habits seem to repeat this banishment and this dispossession, which thereby become embedded, digging in their heels?

The city is a furtive object, it seems, one that conceals itself. Far from dominating their city, the inhabitants seem to lose themselves further and further within it. The production of urban space today hardly offers the inhabitant any respite, now that it even goes so far as to reduplicate this loss of self and of "home" in the city by closing off all prospects through the shrinking of cityscapes, economic pressure, social division, overpricing of "small" property lots, and the concentration of slum areas.[1] Whence the following simple question: *In the collective space that is the city, what part is frequented, appropriated, and effectively inhabited (in the active sense) by each inhabitant?* Probably a quite small part: a few neighborhoods or broken sections of neighborhoods scattered at the will of the fragmented activities that are our lot (work, domicile, leisure, consumption), sometimes one's lodging all by itself, sometimes even less than one's full lodging. Again, quantitative evaluation is hardly

of any significance. Qualitatively speaking, we have no foothold upon the city as a totality.

But what is this urban totality? Experienced daily through functional constraints and operational imperatives, it may be the "city" unit, the "neighborhood" unit, or the "high-density housing complex" unit. These "units" establish a descending series of interlocking memberships. And they take on a life of their own as *given, preexisting totalities* to which one must necessarily refer qua citizen, worker, social insurance contributor, consumer, or inhabitant.

Older urban zones or "aging" mixed neighborhoods exhibit a unity that has been built up little by little. Historical and symbolic communal memory still maintains the illusion that the city dweller has taken part in this development. But the new forms of urban living, such as the "high-density housing complex," are created straightaway as simultaneous totalities.

Whether it be in the overall organization of usages or the mode of production of urban space itself, an increasingly necessitarian rationality seems now to reign over the city. With schematic diagrams, plans, long-term and medium-term forecasts, and timing of urban programs, the urban habitat as given appears as a *conceptual space* laid out and developed according to the rules of the whole and its parts. And sometimes the parts are so well integrated into the whole, and in such an interdependent way, that

> all that is needed is a breakdown of a few power stations or strikes by public transport employees or by garbage collectors for one of the world's most extraordinary powers, such as its great metropolitan areas, to be rendered, in a few hours' time, literally helpless.[2]

The production and organization of the built and developed world have privileged a kind of manipulation of space that is based on a logic of repetition as well as on the following fundamental principle: *produce first the urban habitat so as to hand it over then for use*. Everything takes place according to a relation of container to contained. In its form, the container implies all the signs of the system that has modeled it (real-estate market, economic "imperatives," organizational logic, political conditions, strategies for domination, etc.). The inhabitant who comes

to "fill in" this or that form of habitat is hardly able to discover either the significations assigned to it or its organic relationship to the totality. "Housed" rather than "inhabiting," his daily life seems to unfold in a cramped *living space,* and he finds himself captive of an overly complex network of functional operations.

What kind of fate has befallen the city? Why do the inhabitants have no mastery over the relation of the whole to its parts? *Why,* in short, *is there an inhabitant malaise?*

This question is not a new one. Since the early sixties, it has set off numerous attempts at a response. Thus, the works of certain theorists, which at the present time constitute a veritable corpus of issues and criticisms, if not of scientific knowledge, have elicited responses from urbanists, architects, and even a portion of the public.[3]

Rather than trying to enumerate, in a necessarily incomplete—and, here, tedious—fashion, the entire set of interpretations that constitute the field of the urban question, we prefer to limit ourselves to designating the main *arteries* within which the present currents of thought circulate. In any case, they go from the most specialized kinds of research to the most trivial *doxa*. Here, then, in an undoubtedly approximative way that nevertheless corresponds to our own recollection of the words and writings of urbanists or researchers or inhabitants themselves, are five royal roads for the analysis of urban life, five main ways of finding general and basic *causes* that explain inhabitant malaise.

1. It is the fulfillment of a development plan that introduces too many changes into the initial project

Certain developmental and architectural projects ought to allow for a "social life" that is, if not idyllic, at least decent—that is to say, one in which appropriations of space might be able to succeed without experiencing too many constraints and in which the neighborhood would be considered to be something like an extension of one's own "home." Now, as it turns out, once the project is fulfilled and built, nothing happens as planned. Life is dreary and fragmented. The space is too hostile or impervious to collective habitation. Individuals feel they are being driven back into their lodgings. Who is responsible? Neither the inhabitants nor the authors of the project. Instead, an inevitable series

of constraints and dysfunctions occur in the production process, which warps the project.

Often suggested by urbanists and architects, this answer does not go so far as to challenge the project itself or its general mode of production. Rather, it takes note of the ups and downs of the project in terms of *technical analysis*. Organizational and construction technologies, as well as those pertaining to economic and political strategies, have their weaknesses. The remedy would thus be an increase in technical applications.

2. Disfigured or ill educated, the inhabitant no longer knows how to inhabit his space

This surprising response occurs more frequently among architects than one might think. It may symbolize a vague and never theorized state of mind that is nevertheless apparent in the ideology of urban production, properly speaking.[4]

Formulated in the passive voice, this statement avoids identifying too clearly the origins of this inhabitant malaise. Is it civilization, is it culture, or is it "life today" that is the cause? Whatever the reason, people no longer know how to inhabit the city. The remedy? Relearn how to inhabit, learn how to read the new urban and architectural forms. What is needed, it is thought, is a pedagogy of architecture. And to prevent bad things from happening, whereas their cause remains unclear. Yet a new style of real-estate sales has already anticipated this diagnosis; it now delivers an instruction manual for a "new art of living" along with the keys to the apartment.

3. The inhabitant fails to intervene in the production process

After the first massive wave of urbanization, a sort of "user" awareness was awakened. Some city-planning professionals started to become sensitive to the idea that the inhabitants could intervene in the production of their habitat. This intervention, which could even be done on a recurring basis, would appreciably alter the physiognomy of the building product, with just a little bit of power on the part of those intervening being sufficient. Numerous efforts were made in this direction. The failures of such "advocacy planning" raise, however, the issue of how to delegate speech.[5] Indeed, the inhabitants have to be represented by

someone who can make himself heard, and these "representatives" manipulate the prevailing representations and the ruling code in the sphere of urban production. Now, "operational" constraints are different from the inhabitants' requirements; the former are posited in terms of strategy, geometric and economic quantification, as well as overall "objectives." Between the inhabitant speaking for others and the designer, a twofold distortion therefore slips in, and this renders any hope of effective intervention quite hypothetical. The cause of the malaise of which we have spoken would thus come under the heading of a communication problem. To an urban practitioner, the words uttered by an inhabitant just "do not sound right." Despite the best intentions in the world, the antagonists cannot communicate in a constructive manner. At the crucial moment (generally, when decisions are to be made), the production code blots out the user code.

4. Critique of urban political economy

The fourth type of explanation for inhabitant malaise has been formulated many times over since the mid-sixties. Well-argued analyses develop a critique of urban political economy.[6] The primary cause relates to the ruling economic power, which has transformed the old craftsman-based organization of the construction process,[7] subjugated building production to the system of commerce, and given birth to a technology-based rationality of urban development. Under cover of a second-order effect that is ideological in nature, the same cause turns housing into one *consumer* object among others. The inhabitant thus finds himself "conditioned," handed over to a de facto situation, and besieged by an ideology he cannot help but reproduce.

5. The inhabitant never totally succeeds in adjusting his desire to reality

This type of response to the question of inhabitant malaise takes as essential, if not sufficient, an explanation that would start from the individual histories of residential "subjects." Briefly put, the study of one's lived relationship to inhabited space is insignificant unless it is centered on an *analytic* deciphering of a phantasmatic space (psychoanalytic interpretation of interviews, of tests, and of daydreams). Reference must therefore be made to the initial childhood experience of space, which is

always tied to the parental imago. The structuration of one's own body depends on this, and it is on this basis that everyday space will later be lived. The "pregnancy" of archaic space would thus be an essential or formal cause of people's inability to appropriate the space of their habitat or of the ever possible conflicts between the spatial archetype and the lived experience of the various lodgings a user occupies in the course of his existence.

Starting from this explanatory core, psychosociology has attempted to shed some light on the problem of the inhabitant's relationship to his habitat. In the most nuanced studies,[8] economic and historical factors are also taken into account. It is granted, moreover, that such factors have had a significant impact on the initial childhood experience of space in a specific home setting, within this or that family, at such and such a time. These factors condition the "subjects" that are observed today. Also, psychosociological interpretation wavers between two systems of causality. For psychosociology, the concrete observational object is the individual; the inferences it advances concern a "social practice" or a "social change" to which, in other respects, the individual is referred. In all, inhabitant malaise would be explained by a deep-seated cause that is psychological in nature and that is incorporated into an efficient or circumstantial cause tied to economic and social status.

Impasses

Theoretical or Methodological Impasses

This chart of the main lanes of explanation of inhabitant malaise is obviously quite cursory. It places on the same level a quite diverse set of discourses, mixing form and content. Each of the arguments is of extremely unequal consistency. Indeed, it will not be lost on the reader that the stated causes of this inhabitant malaise seem to be highly varied. The nature of the causality in question is sometimes instrumental (the functions of the system of production), sometimes psychological, sometimes sociological, sometimes economic.

In the field of scientific knowledge that investigates the urban world,

two theoretical routes have been particularly well developed. The first, which takes note of the prevailing mechanisms of economic production and social reproduction, offers an essential key to understanding that the socioeconomic setting defines our "conditioning." The second intimates that individual factors enter into the equation. Should not one be interested as much in the overall situation as in the singularities belonging to each individual?

Now, it turns out that these two paths are not complementary. They do not happen to intersect. The first, which argues along the lines of economic and social determinants, necessarily privileges a macroscopic reading of urban life. Figures at the ready, it seeks overall coherencies. It will pick up, for example, similarly occurring housing practices within a given class. The investigation will bear on statistical sets of data and on questions posed to residents in questionnaires and interviews. But this will be a "directed" reading. And the grid of analysis will not be able to take into account the microcosmic level of everyday practices, which are often complex and contradictory. For, well-argued explanatory formulations—whose goal is to obtain a restricted number of deep-seated causes—cannot linger over mere singularities. Scattering out the causes in that way would remove all coherency from one's approach to the problem. One would no longer know "why . . . ?" One would overlook the causal nature of the question. And the investigator would find no unity in the system of explanation, whose existence he had nevertheless assumed at the outset of his undertaking.

For its part, psychosociological thought finds its coherency in a set of psychological categories. In other words, the reality around which the interpretation turns is the instantiated principle of the individual. In a first stage, what is interpreted holds only for each subject taken separately. Subsequent comparisons and classifications are based on a listing of common factors (factor analysis). Inferences from the individual to the collective remain hypothetical.[9] In such a reading of urban life, the best guarantee of coherency and universality (what would hold for a collection of "subjects" would hold for the collectivity) is the system of causal interpretation. Among inhabitants, the mediations are not concrete but, rather, theoretical.

Thus, while the most well-argued applied research papers endeavor-

ing to explain urban malaise offer valuable systems of causal explanation, they fail to provide an account of either the concrete aspect of people's everyday existence or the lived mediations by means of which the inhabitants of an urban space form a collectivity. In order to satisfy a scientific method that often confuses "rigor" and "exactitude," *they neglect the intermediate and the singular.*

There is always a "remainder" in analytic operations that involve division. Indeed, daily life examined in this way must verify or invalidate hypotheses that emanate from an already constituted field of scientific knowledge. From what it expresses, one extracts a signified that will be subjected to "content analysis." The containers or the signifiers (words, drawings, and gestures of the inhabitants under questioning) have a purely instrumental and, under this heading, negligible value.

It would seem that the expression of inhabitant malaise would always have to confirm either the state of the system of economic production and social reproduction or the theories that are considered authoritative in the human and social sciences. *Might not inhabitant expression have anything to say on its own?*

Through these *theoretical and methodological impasses,* the lived practices of the inhabitant are not apparent. This is for the simple reason that the modalities of questioning involved do not allow them to appear.

Yet what is this "remainder," this surplus that cannot be retrieved by the machinery of production and that is situated outside the scientific categories currently in force? And how can it take on meaning, if not via an investigation that takes form outside the universe of totalizing representation, outside the sphere of necessary causes and "why" questions?

An Exemplary Impasse

Beside or between the arteries of knowledge about the city, we must find some side roads or connecting streets. Before doing that, we want to offer, as an example, a type of approach to everyday life that we have attempted under the heading of a counterdemonstration.

Let us consider the everyday practice of walking around and through

a neighborhood. The problem is to find the signification of this practice, to evaluate how a laid-out and developed space can be frequented, and to be able to appreciate its value as a social indicator. Let us question a bunch of inhabitants. They recount to us their routes, which we can thus trace on a background map. Topographical space offers the following apparent advantage, that it provides a common frame of reference for individual practices.

Now, in this attempt to grasp their paths, their walks, several difficulties became apparent to us. First, what graphic code are we to choose? Dotted lines will indicate an occasional trip; an unbroken line, frequent trips. But all that remains quite approximative. How are we to trace one and the same trip that, for one day, merited ten minutes of detailed narrative and, for the next day, only a few seconds?

One can superimpose maps of the trips sketched on transparent tracing paper in a such way as to assess the rate at which various pedestrian pathways are frequented. Yet, when faced with the liveliness of the oral narrative and with its thousand qualitative details, such a topographical summary no longer made a great deal of sense. Either one treated the narrated lived experience with disdain, thereby sacrificing time to topographical spatiality, or one really recognized how limited graphic representation is when it comes to everyday expression.

A topographical translation, like any interpretation based on continuities and contiguities, thus seemed to us an improper way of accounting for spatial practices as they are lived day to day. We were in an impasse. Let us mention several forms of this aporia.[10]

1. Limits

Unexpectedly, limits display other forms than boundary markings. There certainly are some represented limits that do not vary at all and divide up the space in question. There are other ones that owe nothing to geometric representation of the space but exist, rather, within a mobile spatial practice; they have meaning only to the extent that the inhabitant makes reference to the *possibility of transgression*. These limits can be perceived very well in all movements of avoidance recounted by the inhabitant. In its graphic representation, the trip appears as a continuous trace that, at a certain moment, crosses some boundaries; everything is

continuous and contiguous; at the same time, it clears a path through the space and is homogeneous in its extension. Nevertheless, the trace of the steps manifests a movement that varies depending on whether the space is empty or full, with curious "limits" liable to appear and disappear, to emerge alongside and parallel to the direction of one's walk, and to exist at one hour of the day but not at another. The supposed flatness of inhabited space dissolves into a heterogeneity that is connected, momentarily and fragmentarily, only by the succession of steps. The intactness [*La totalité pleine*] developers of the laid-out space had proposed now disappears. Some inhabitants who, spatially speaking, travel throughout the neighborhood nevertheless feel everywhere that they are outsiders. What has become of the totality? How has it faded away?

2. Beyond the appropriated and the unappropriated: something appropriable

The demarcation between the appropriated space and the unappropriated space pertains to a synchronic representation of limits. In narrative accounts of everyday walks, the initial consistency of these two antagonistic designations of a laid-out and developed space collapses. In lived time, one finds no appropriation or counterappropriation that would have a definitive meaning or that would be established once and for all. They are but marks momentarily affixed upon a space that has been the field of favorable or unfavorable movements of appropriation. However long lasting they might be—and there are always a certain number of inappropriate or unappropriable spaces—these marks do not account for the "how" of appropriation. How is it that one inhabitant, who strides through and knows perfectly well the zone into which he is venturing, remains an outsider; how is it that another, who takes infrequent walks but avoids nothing, also is an outsider, if it is not by the absence of something *appropriable*? The first person walks through the space in saturation mode; the second in the mode of emptiness, vacancy. There is no more place for the appropriable, or nothing glimpsed that could be appropriated. Inhabited space then becomes homogeneous; it offers one no foothold. For the inhabitant, it has no more of an everyday meaning than some geometric diagram.

In fact, the qualification of appropriation depends neither on the

quantity of the space traveled through nor on the constancy of territorial limits but, rather, on the degree of possibilities it includes. The "trace" of a route signals an action and the way in which it unfolds in everyday time. Another totality then seems to sketch itself out on the horizon of what is to come. In what way can such a totality, which moves from the absent to the projected, and from the projected to the imaginary, be equivalent to the one planning produces for us?

3. For a daily stroll, what is more metaphorical than a map [*un plan*]? To the extent that one seeks not to evaluate the way in which a space conceived as a container can be filled in by some inhabitant content but, rather, how the act of progressively inhabiting a built-up space is constituted through the patient rhythm of one's walks, a logic of serial articulation comes to substitute itself for that of distinction and territorial boundaries. The totality—which is the necessary referent of the planned parts—gives way to the "globality" of the world of everyday activity, which is always present in each step, but which is also always in the course of development, in the course of an enacted process that renders things explicit.

Thus, none of the narratives of the inhabitants' trips ever omits the presence of the collective dimension. This presence is not necessarily personalized. Very often imagined or the object of a presentiment on the basis of spatial markers, it insists and persists in a silent and diffuse way. Let us cite another example. One's trip to work is not equivalent to the use of pedestrian spaces that mark out little by little the abandonment of one's domicile and the appearance of the public sphere. On the contrary, the sense of preoccupation and the feelings of constraint that are quite characteristic of this kind of activity accompany from the start, like an atmosphere, one's first morning steps. The referent for one's walks is not the simultaneity of a planned spatial whole but, rather, at each moment of the stroll, the coexistence of the different instantiated principles involved in everyday life. The explication, the development in movement of this coexistence, resembles a sort of creation, and through this creation the space into which one has gone takes on this or that quality, depending on the occasion, but no longer has any permanency of its own (except in representation and on maps).

In summary, whether one sketches it on a map or sets it within the framework of a causal system, the practice of inhabiting as it is lived always escapes. Does one want to *make it say* something? It loses all consistency and fades away. It is apparent only in the extreme complexity of its *ways of being,* and it disappears in the face of all the "why" questions that are all too prompt to find causes for it.

Perhaps what is then needed is to settle into the immediacy of the plurality of *modes* of inhabiting and to stay [*séjourner*] there for a sufficiently long time without knowing in advance if these modes are causes, effects, or something else. And one must choose the paths that would be likely to make inhabitant expression appear, that would grant it the time to recite its singularities, its minuscule day-to-day variations, its detours, and its delays. It would be necessary, in short, *to postpone for some time the repetition of our "why" questions and to give free rein to the "how"*—that is to say, to substitute a modal type of interpretation for a causal type of explanation.

Side Streets

Intermediate Practices

The side street or connecting route leads "to a place to which the main road does not lead."[11] In the main lanes of analysis of urban life, one's interest lies in clearly locatable objects. The study inclines toward some portion of the space—the housing stock, the neighborhood—or one aspect of city operations—traffic, businesses, public services, etc.—or some definite practice—work, domestic life, consumption, leisure, and so on. The judicious circumscribing of the field of investigation seems to be an essential condition for the rigor of one's argument (not to mention the ease with which one then uses statistical data that have cohesion only to the extent that they concern *a single* object).

Now, there are other practices that elude such approaches, and "the main road does not lead" to them. Highly polymorphic, mixing together, in the course of lived experience, what the scientific outlook distinguishes, these are what we may call *intermediate practices*. Daily

strolls, it seems to us, belong to that class of overlooked practices that apparently cannot be co-opted by the commercial economy and that are, in the view of scientific knowledge, insignificant. Defying functional classifications, these walks of course link one's place of domicile to workplaces and to various leisure and consumer sites. The important thing, however, is that these spatial mediations are ordered according to the properties of lived time. The time of walking is the time of the promenade, of "going out on the town," but also that of hustle and bustle and fuss. Activities that have been classified in functional sequences now come alive and rediscover their lived unity. One and the same trip can summon up the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the necessary and the gratuitous.

Finally, because the act of walking is an intermediate practice, it seems unremarkable and hardly of any interest. The inhabitant does not, so to speak, talk about it, and no causal explanation has yet come to apply to it any reductionist filter. This practice therefore ought to be valuable to us because, barely occulted by abstract representations, it still allows one to see how the life of the inhabitant is steeped in quite immediate sensations and impromptu actions.

Indications about the Method of Approach

So as not to delay the presentation of these walking practices, we shall simply indicate our methodological options.[12]

A methodological approach that has chosen the path of *modal analysis* (one oriented by the "how" rather than by the "why") collides right away against a major difficulty. Everyday practice is necessarily forgetful. It expresses itself through walks that speech struggles to tell over again. Nevertheless, better than topographical observation, oral expression has appeared to us to mimic quite closely the act of strolling. Like the latter, it is fluid, prone to digressions, capable of forgetting what is apparently essential and of lingering over details. Is it not another expression of an identical way of being?

Yet how is one to reawaken this experience of the everyday, which is often highly immediate in character and is forgotten as soon as it is

enacted? In other words, what form of question was it necessary to pose to the inhabitants?

Let us imagine that the question would be as follows: "How do you walk through your neighborhood; what trips do you take?" The interviewee will respond in the style of the question, that is to say, *in a general mode*. Collecting his memories, he will produce an abstract collage. He will respond, "In general, I go by here." All lived qualities will disappear. In *one time,* he will have summed up his walking past.

Now, in everyday life, one does not appeal only to a memory of the past. There is also a memory enacted in the present—"protentional" memory, we would say, rather than retentional—the kind by which we organize our perceptions according to what will be memorable. In other words, one would have to take memory not only when it is no longer anything but a memory but still at the moment when it is constituted, at the very instant when it organizes the expression of a way of being to which it will be able to relate later on. In the present, memory is the "tomorrow" of currently lived experience.

It becomes possible at this point to understand both how a lived experience is constituted and how it is expressible. For, nothing of everyday life is communicable if what is perceived is not memorable, that is to say, eventually narratable, and if it is not, from the very start, constituted as an expression. Several practical consequences follow therefrom:

1. The investigation of a "how" of everyday inhabiting has no meaning except apropos of a specified (here and now) lived experience. Thus, such modalities can be apprehended only through individual narratives.

2. So as not to weaken too much the fragile ties that connect an expressible lived experience to a living experience that is effectively inexpressible in itself, one must limit as much as possible both abstract representations and general value judgments that the customary way of conducting interviews tends to induce, if not to incite. *Whence the appeal to an enacted and protentional memory, which favors observation of the most unremarkable of feelings and actions.*

3. The conduct of the narrative[13] is recognized and accepted for what by nature it is: *an oral relationship with social constraints* (the memo-

> rable and the narratable are always commanded by the other person's eventual question). With such recognition and acceptance comes a reintroduction of the affective level between questioner and respondent, as against the hypothetical and illusory position of the abstract observer. And perhaps this presence of the affective within the narration of lived experience guarantees (as more faithful to the originary climate surrounding the conduct of the narrative) greater rigor than that of observational neutrality. Thus, the interviewing method is completely "directive," in the sense that a duty to recount is established, yet at the same time nondirective, in that the only obligation is to recount. One allows the narrative of the inhabitant's lived experience to appear as its mood suggests and at its own pace. It seems that the categories of "directedness" and "nondirectedness" are not relevant in this case, either because they unjustifiably bracket the necessarily social and constraining relationship of the interview situation or because they promote a "content" that is already formatted by the hidden inclusion of categories within the questions.

The question posed to the inhabitants was the following: "Will you recount in a few weeks the walks you have made from today onward?" The first interview was therefore always brief, since it aimed only at clarifying in common language the duty of self-observation that was to be accomplished. During the second interview, the inhabitant recounted his trips. A third interview seemed necessary when the inhabitants had developed a taste for going back over the unremarkable particularities of their existence and wanted to add to their initial narrative.

Final Note: A Last Word about the Terrain Chosen

Any contemporary urban setting could have served as a field of investigation. Was one going to take an entire city? The number of inhabitants one would have had to question for a minimum of overlap was incompatible with the bounds of this work. One cannot be satisfied with surveys or brief questionnaires when it comes to everyday life. The narrative of a single urban voyager who travels all over the city with a floating but curiosity-filled attention and who recounts the city while

recounting himself brings a richer and more coherent "givenness" than any account of the responses to a hundred "questionnaires" about lived experience.

We chose a smaller grouping of residential units. Such a grouping, we felt, was more appropriate, both as a well-delimited space common to the individuals being questioned and as a site for a coherent expression of their differences.

Finally, it was important that the residential complex chosen be conceived as a totality and that it be made the object of explicit research into its qualities. Conceived as a totality, it would be the paradigm for an increasingly common type of laid-out and developed space: the high-density housing complex, the production of which is taking place before our very eyes. Indeed, such a complex cannot be taken as going without saying, for it raises many problems. And it would include a social program aimed at ameliorating the existence of the city dweller, if not at promoting a better social life.

The "Arlequin" (Harlequin) neighborhood in Grenoble, France, seemed to us to satisfy this set of conditions, and in particular the last one.[14]