

“*Flânoter*”

The Montreal Pedestrian Narrates

1. Gress

The Montreal pedestrian passes advertisements in French and English recruiting to the Canadian Association of Chartered Accountants:

--- G R E S S E Z PLUS VITE.
--- G R E S S MORE QUICKLY.

The advertisement anticipates the on-and-up work ethic prefix *pro*, then supplies it: “Devenez pro”—“Become pro.”

Progress literally means a motivated step, a “forward stride.” Though familiar in both languages only in their pronominal compounds, *gressez* and *gress* are independent verbs, denoting intransitive bipedal locomotion. The ad thus betrays a contrary impulse, cousin to the Latin saw *festina lente* and the German *eile mit Weile*: DAWDLE FASTER. Many footloose Montreal writers get the message; while the accountants urge pedestrians to stride towards professional accreditation, they invite readers to dally. This is not as innocent as it sounds.

Reading public signs against type mimics Situationist *détournement*, the extraction of a saucy sense from atrophied public communication. *Détournement* was first practised on foot, during randomized urban *dérives* that Guy Debord defined as “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” under “the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities” (62). This mode of urban gression self-consciously derives and yet also deviates from *flânerie*, a practice retaining class hypocrisy: both genteel sauntering and delinquent “loitering,” gadding about and vagrancy. No longer, however, does it narrowly denote disaffected bourgeois masculinity, decadence, or a

patrician imperturbability immune to the clamour and solicitations of the city. Montreal's diverse *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* are stalkers and foragers on the prowl for the composite character of a city that defies subordination to a single or unifying social script.

André Carpentier rehabilitates *flânerie* over three years of intermittent strolls along the four hundred kilometres of Montreal's alleys, a bivalent routine of idleness and activity that organizes his *Ruelles, jours ouvrables* (*Alleys, Working Days*):

La flânerie engage à conjuguer par la promenade des espaces publics, à zigzaguer sans but, sans calcul, prémuni de son flair, de son acuité, de sa pleine subjectivité, de sorte à enclencher sa fonction de machine à percevoir, aussi à se cogner aux lieux, puisque *le corps nous unit aux choses*, comme l'écrit Merleau-Ponty. (16, emphasis original)¹

Carpentier coins the portmanteau verb *flânoter* to denote the twin practice of loitering and noting: "J'aime à croire que le verb clé de mon entreprise est flânoter, qui, à l'oreille, joint la flâne à la prise de notes" (102).² Carpentier's very title insists on the productive cultural work mere meandering may accomplish, and his neologism unites peripatetic and rhetorical agency. Such conflation has an august pedigree, for already in the 1589 *Arte of English Poesie*, the earliest English manual of its kind, George Puttenham translates *digressio* as "straggler" (240), personifying as pedestrian the figure of insouciant verbal deviation.

That straggling can be unlawful, Carpentier is reminded by the local police. The bipedal deviant must answer for his presence in the very lanes of his childhood, and when he explains that he is taking notes for a book, the constable retorts that "ce n'est pas la place pour écrire un roman" (32)—this is no place to write a novel. Carpentier must assume a *cognito*, pushing a bicycle to gain safe conduct. One of his inspirations, Franz Hessel, whose pedestrian itineraries of Berlin inspired Walter Benjamin to recuperate the category of *flânerie*, identifies himself as "the suspect" ("*der Verdächtige*") (Hessel 23), because his moseys along the Kurfürstenstraße routinely arouse suspicion. Echoing the distinction between gress and progress, Hessel laments that, in his bustling metropolis, "one doesn't go wherever, one goes to somewhere. It is not easy for our sort" (26).³

Pedestrian zones are precisely where a good many Montrealers have been writing their novels, in part because these areas elude or thwart official enforcement. Jane Jacobs identified sidewalks, alleys, and small parks as the basic units of urban vitality in *The Death and Life of Great American*

Cities. Carpentier and his fellow pedestrian writers are keen to “*flânoter*” the polyglot interstitial passages of the city, in the pervasive electric light looking and pricking up their ears to the diapason of the bilingual and intercultural dual city. These writers, including Leonard Cohen, Hugh Hood, Gail Scott, Rawi Hage, and Peter Dubé, register Montreal’s meshwork in the itinerant plurality of languages, descending into the aural labyrinth to recombine its elements into an insurgent public space. They equate wandering with knowing and reveal, indeed revel in the fact, that third spaces—those proximate, levelling, and convivial public areas between home and work that foster transient encounter (see Soja)—are not confined strictly to determinate sites but are as fluid and situational as the languages used there, and as fluid as pedestrian subjectivity itself.

A narrative orientation on linear, successive street-level vulnerability accumulates relations through saccadic, unpredictable lived experience. Deviation, surprise, and change of aspect are at the basis of such an aesthetic. Far from being a nostalgic throwback to pre-mechanized modes of transit and social organization, or a supplement to the tourist guide, pedestrian narrative can offer a vigorous restatement of the primary and ineradicable conditions of human encounter within blurred and fluctuating boundaries, including linguistic and conceptual boundaries. In the Montreal of these writers, relations are impelled rather than impeded by ambiguity, the etymology of which is bipedal indecision (“walking to and fro”). In political terms, such labile relations confound the restrictive identities of conventional political affiliation; for liberty is exercised on the hoof as well as at the barricades, a mutable positionality that anonymous, informal pedestrianism promotes.

The peripatetic Montreal narratives examined here seek a mutable ecology hidden in plain sight. They recover what Francesco Careri calls “passional regions” in “a fluid space” (“*terreni passionali*” in “*uno spazio liquido*”), urban areas that generate disorienting but productive affective tensions (73). Areas that, in this essay, comprise Carpentier’s alleys, Hood’s Mont Royal, Cohen’s parc Lafontaine, and the Main of Scott and Hage. The walkers here examined do not simply record but also remake Montreal in a stealthy guerrilla urbanism (see Hou 1) that is in the process of reforming the contemporary city.

2. Transgress

Though characterized as an exemplary “walkable” city (see Soderstrom 218, and Speck), Montreal is not a placid jurisdiction, and indeed the city’s layout

enables literal aggression: confrontational walking. There are many large squares and boulevards well adapted to unauthorized public circulation of the kind that disrupted the 2008 World Economic Summit and sustained the *printemps érable* protests against university tuition increases four years later that contributed to the defeat of the Jean Charest Liberal government.

In Peter Dubé's peripatetic political novel *The City's Gates*, the city's gaits assume a radicalizing logic that crystalizes in anti-capitalist campaigns when Montreal hosts an international summit. At a speakeasy named the Ocean, where the narrator, Lee, collects intelligence in the conflicting roles of turncoat and secret agent, a member of the clandestine "Mals" says to him of the renegades, student protestors, and street kids:

[T]hey all land here because they're *moving*. They're not sitting still. What you just don't get, Lee, is that we're—all of us—about trajectory, about a kind of voyage. We're the fucking city's gates. People come through us when they're on the way in to the clanging, clashing life of the town, or when they're on the way out. Which way are you headed? Because right now you're stationary. (Dubé 123)

The novel follows Lee's pedestrian passage through varied ambiances into enlistment in revolutionary activism. He acquires a progressive social conscience by moving on foot.

In Dubé's novel, Montreal is a vigorously contested social imaginary, a city of uneven geographies and spatial instabilities that its pedestrian narrators gingerly tread. The densely varied urban scale, intensified by the historical diversity of buildings and architectural styles, as well as the topographic compression between river and mountain, invites the plotting of narrative vectors on an insistently bipedal scale. The writers examined here recognize, like Dubé, the possibilities inherent in so much propinquity from port to peak: ethnic groups, economic classes, and linguistic borders are contiguous, largely unmarked, and fluid.

A walkable city reinforces the real conditions of knowledge that the prevalent transport paradigm elides. "For all of us, in reality, knowledge is not built up as we go across, but rather grows as we go along," social anthropologist Tim Ingold writes in *Lines* (102). People come to know what they do, Ingold explains in a later essay,

by *going around* in an environment. The knowledge they acquire, I argue, is integrated not *up* the levels of a classification but *along* paths of movement, and people grow into it by following trails through a meshwork. I call this trail-following *wayfaring*, and conclude that it is through wayfaring and not transmission that knowledge is carried on. (*Being Alive* 143, emphasis original)

The wayfarer contrives an itinerary along a way, from which narrative emerges. Ingold contrasts the wayfarer with the navigator, who “has before him a complete representation of the territory, in the form of a cartographic map, upon which he can plot a course even before setting out. The journey then is no more than an explication of the plot” (*Lines* 15-16). For the wanderer, by contrast, route, text, and memory are journeys made “rather than an object found” (16). The philosopher Frédéric Gros similarly exalts the walk as a liberating opportunity “to be disentangled from the web of exchanges, no longer reduced to a junction in the network redistributing information, images, and goods” (4-5).

Walking is the means by which stories are converted to a form of knowledge that never forgets its basis in processes and that derives its vitality from the vulnerable conditions of finite embodiment rather than in hypostatized forms. “The urban stroller is *subversive*,” Gros insists: “He subverts the crowd, the merchandise, and the town, along with their values” (177). The ambiguous forms of “resistance” the walker takes can be peculiarly potent precisely because, by and large, resistance is impalpable: “Subversion is not a matter of opposing but of evading, deflecting, altering with exaggeration, accepting blandly and moving rapidly on” (Gros 178). As we will see in the case of Gail Scott, *la flâneuse* subverts by definition, as Lauren Elkin notes:

[I]t's the centre of cities where women have been empowered, by plunging into the heart of them, and walking where they're not meant to. Walking where other people (men) walk without eliciting comment. That is the transgressive act. You don't need to crunch around in Gore-Tex to be subversive, if you're a woman. Just walk out your front door. (20)

Such literal aberration (“wandering off”) becomes a subtle tactic of urban reconceptualization, and the inconspicuously renegade wanderers of Montreal pedestrian fiction collect into an unarmed militia that has goaded and increasingly guided city planners into what is now becoming axiomatic of public policy.

3. Congress

Mont Royal is the city's most prominent pedestrian contact zone. Sherry Simon notes that Frederick Law Olmsted, in designing the park in the 1880s,

conceived of the mountain as a poem whose meaning would progressively unfold as the viewer/walker followed its paths. The landscape was a work of art not only through the shapes that the author had scripted into it, but through the ever-changing readings that the viewers/walkers would create as a result of their particular trajectory and viewing positions. (194)

These "ever-changing readings" attract writers like Hugh Hood to the park. His choice of the mountain as the hub of his Expo '67 periplus *Around the Mountain: Scenes from Montreal Life* is consonant with Olmsted's determination to rectify sectarianism in a morally improving *théâtre verdure*. In "Looking Down from Above," Hood's alter ego hikes along the paths behind the Université de Montréal during la Fête nationale, Quebec's national holiday, ascending in easy stages the north salient, where he happens upon *la fête champêtre* of his old neighbours les Bourbonnais, who invite him to partake. The emaciated husband, who had improved Hood's French and revealed to him the plight of the city's working class, suffers from a pulmonary disorder likely contracted on his menial job, which he must retain because he is without employment insurance. Yet he and his wife have raised their children into the middle class, and together they raise a toast to national self-determination. Suspended above the city and beyond its social stratification, this is as close as they come to politics on this most political of Quebec holidays. Douglas Ivison notes how, in *Around the Mountain*, practices akin to Situationist *dérive* and *détournement*

allow the narrators to make the urban space comprehensible for themselves and for their readers. More significantly, they allow the narrators to stumble across palimpsestic sites and to go to the margins of the city, and occasionally beyond. They are the means by which the text is able to make visible the process of urbanization (Ivison 356).

Hood continues upwards towards a promontory that will make the city visible and "comprehensible." "I could look directly down on the Bourbonnais, still soberly picnicking, and below them again on girlish tennis players whirling short skirts, a strangely mixed perspective, but I couldn't hear any voices" (Hood 94). The diorama unites the contrary purposes of a city in the midst of Expo glamour and nationalist clamour, but it can do so only in the absence of increasingly disputatious "voices." Hood's irenic conception of incremental civic rapprochement between French, English, Indigenous peoples and diasporic groups, which the mountain appears to nurture and his tread to affirm, hazards a naive anachronism that the October Crisis soon chastened.

In the months before the eruption of the FLQ insurgency, Hood could still entrust social division to the "safety valve" of the city's parks: "Urban life is full enough of strain, God knows, and if it were not for the parks the multilingual confrontations of our two million might soon become unbearable" (96). Yet in the book's next story a nationalist melee occurs in parc Lafontaine, the very name of which dignifies French-English collaboration in nation-building:

“There’s trouble anyway” (96). Hood attempts to represent that most politically volatile of pedestrian masses, the demonstration, when a street-fighting manual labourer is roughed up by a riot squad at an *indépendantiste* rally. For the love of a level-headed working-class student, the labourer eventually rejects mobilization to take advantage of the educational opportunities emanating from the newly established CEGEP college system, which in Hood’s earnest liberal allegory salves ethnic and class conflict. There’s trouble anyway, of the kind that romantic love and educational reform paradoxically will only promote. Although the Quebec Liberal government established them partly to contain and redirect working-class nationalist dissent, the CEGEPs instead incubated the sovereignty movement.

In *Beautiful Losers*, Leonard Cohen had recently and sardonically conjured parc Lafontaine as a cradle of national grievance and self-affirmation during *la Révolution tranquille*. The renegade federal parliamentarian F. barges in on the apolitical narrator’s apartment and jostles him awake: “We’re going for a walk” (122). He compels his bleary friend to confess that he “wanted miracles” and leads him in the direction of secular wonder (124). “Arm in arm, we walked through the narrow harbour streets of Montreal” (125) towards the park, where a nationalist rally is protesting Queen Elizabeth II’s state visit.

The rapidly changing topography and toponymy of the geographically varied and historically rich city tangibly predisposes the course of an episode organized along pedestrian vectors. The harbour streets, which Cohen would shortly memorialize in the sedating feminine rhymes of “Suzanne,” are a cobbled warren of vacated limestone warehouses, notary offices, seminaries, Catholic churches, and townhouses, vestigial successively of Ancien Régime absolutism, Roman clerical domination, and British colonialism. The mercantile and financial activity has shifted downtown, and the port authority has moved operations to larger quays, leaving the old city to fall back on tourism. In strolling towards an Arcadian greensward of utopian nationalist autarky, Cohen’s pedestrian pair literally shifts from the riparian, pre-industrial provincial harbour towards a congested, commercial quarter of the working poor. Parc Lafontaine is a Confederation common planted for the political palliation and salubrious cultural uplift of the French working-class, but as *Around the Mountain* chronicles, it is being repurposed as a shambolic venue of nationalist *ressentiment*.

Cohen’s narrator quickly recognizes the precariousness of his status. “This is an ugly crowd, F. Let’s walk faster. —No, it is a beautiful crowd” (125). F. “pulled me to the scene of the commotion” (125) where, to F.’s satisfaction,

the narrator is groped and soon joins in the denunciations against the English. "I was now a joyful particle" of the crowd, reciprocating the gropes: "[O]ur rhythmical movements . . . corresponded to the very breathing of the mob" (127, 128). F. is triumphantly raised by the protesters, "and I knew all of us were going to come together" (129). The ecstatic demonstration, however, prematurely dissolves in a kind of *coitus interruptus*. Though the narrator implores the protesters to resume, they are in no mood to appreciate his irreverence. He is exposed as an Anglo and vilified as Jew. He has to be rescued from the angry mob by his guide. Yet F. reassures his crestfallen friend of his success: he has "passed the test" (131). How so?

Individual and collective aspirations, vital to the constitutional debates surrounding Quebec sovereignty, conflict in *Beautiful Losers* and *Around the Mountain*. A decade after the publication of "Two Concepts of Liberty," Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty has been taken to the street. The positive concept, Berlin asserts, is self-realized in principled political action, while the negative is a bulwark against state interference in private life (for recent discussion, see Gatti). It was the constitutional privileges of Catholic worship, freedom of assembly and association, the parliamentary franchise, and *habeas corpus* accorded under the Crown, rather than the regicidal secularism of the French revolutionary *droits des hommes*, that resonated most profoundly in an ultramontane French Canada wary of the expansionist Protestant capitalism emanating from its southern border, with consequences that survived the 1837 Rebellions, the Conscription Crisis, the October Crisis, and the unilateral repatriation of the Constitution (see Lamonde, chapters 3-6). The political career of Pierre Elliott Trudeau epitomized the transition between polarities of positive and negative liberty that issued in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Cohen's narrator walks from private liberty to civic republicanism and back out again, like many Canadian liberals of the period of the Quiet Revolution, but this does not signal disavowal, disaffection, or impassivity. He has indeed "passed the test." The civic is measured out in footsteps, mapped as precisely described commons where personal freedoms and group obligations intersect and entangle, then just as freely disentangle and separate. Transient assembly, rather than institutional partisan affiliation, becomes a pedestrian mode of political agility, an anonymous mode of circulation divested of stable ideological markers or fixed self-identification. This becomes a guerilla tactic, as in Dubé's *The City's Gates*; walking off, as in

Beautiful Losers, does not necessarily equate with political disenchantment or apathy, any more than marching in demonstrates fealty to a program, as in *Around the Mountain*.

The *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* of the texts under discussion are not the blasé possessive individualists of Marxist critique from C. B. Macpherson to Alain Badiou, but social actors engaged at the level of their gait, along the sidewalk that Jane Jacobs first identified in this very period as a political space where personal freedoms and collective political agency converge (see Jacobs 29-88). The sidewalk and other pedestrian third spaces align and permeate the politics they facilitate.

A material performativity may be simultaneous with, or, as Judith Butler proposes, operate even prior to its discursive complement. Butler argues that speech acts constitutive of political enlistment do not precede but proceed from an emergent consensus of action: “the assembly of bodies, their gestures and movements, their vocalizations, and their ways of acting in concert” (Butler 50). Performative political enactments, in conjunction with speech acts (themselves increasingly virtualized through portable and other electronic media), materially may give rise to collective self-constitution. What the Montreal pedestrians narrate, then, is not quietist defection from civic engagement but footloose forays against a politics that impedes alternative interstitial paths into the urban imaginary.

4. Digress

In Gail Scott’s metafiction *Heroine*, the eponymous protagonist is wholly a creature, indeed creation of, the city, and of a city author—the interdiegetic one, as well; both are mobile textual entities generating provisional, conflicting representations of politically enfranchised femininity. In the era of the first Parti Québécois government, the feminism and class solidarity of this heroine with the *indépendantistes* is jeopardized by her English origins, her Marxist abhorrence of ethnic nationalism, her avant-garde aesthetic, and her vestigial petit-bourgeois yearning for domesticity. The leftists, sovereigntists, and surrealists with whom she makes common cause are not immune to chauvinism, for their anti-establishment radicalism often excuses sexism and personal irresponsibility.

With rare exceptions (notably Virginia Woolf’s saunter in “Street Haunting”), *flânerie* was a male prerogative almost until the Situationists began recruiting female street kids, such as Michèle Bernstein, into their milieu in the 1950s. *Le flâneur*, like *der Stadtbummler*, *il vagabondo*, and

other vagrants, is male because urban space is, literally, aggressively gender encoded, necessitating the recent neologism *la flâneuse*. What is overlooked, however, even by Lauren Elkin in *Flâneuse*, is that the activity itself is grammatically feminine: *la flânerie*. Stereotypes of femininity get attached to the act, regardless of actor. The blasé window-shopping trapeze of the leisured bourgeois woman, on display yet enticingly unavailable among the Paris *passages*, is not a deviation from, but paradigmatic of, *une flânerie* resistant to the gendered criteria of male taxonomists. This forager empowered by her purse meanwhile crosses paths with the determined gait of her stalking double the streetwalker, a recurrent figure in *Heroïne*. In "Théorie de la démarche," the earliest such "Theory of the Walk," Honoré de Balzac makes the implicit distinction: "En marchant, les femmes peuvent tout montrer, mais ne rien laisser voir" (75).⁴ *Allure* is the literal French for gait.

Le flâneur roved bearing the safe conduct of his sex. Women could not even sport proper boots, as George Sand realized when she discarded her delicate shoes, which made her feel on the pavement "like a boat on ice," and donned male attire and boots in a Paris at once brought effortlessly under heel: "With those steel-tipped heels I was solid on the sidewalk at last. I dashed back and forth across Paris and felt I was going around the world" (Sand 203-04). An exhilarating mobility unencumbered by tight dainty footwear revealed itself and the city to her, as it does to Scott's heroine, who strides out to affront a closely monitored, confined, and menaced female mobility. Dianne Chisholm notes that, in contrast to the disaffected bourgeois individualism of the Second Empire male epitome, "Scott's *flâneur* is neither self-possessed nor naturally detached" (166). She cannot be because, in the fractious public spaces of *Heroïne*, Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial narratives disrupt as much as complement one another in ways that hobble her step. Scott adopts a corresponding rhetoric of interruption modelled on the saccadic pace of her troubled *flâneuse*. The prose is inflected by the everyday conditions of highly politicized linguistic and gendered duality.

Scott's alter ego puts on "the pink lenses I call my glasses of objective chance" (*Heroïne* 73) and sallies forth to meet her Surrealist *cénacle* for a *déambulation*. On a detour up the mountain she runs into her fellow members, who are draping André Breton slogans from trees in a park whose designer barred signage from it.

LA BEAUTÉ SERA CONVULSIVE OU NE SERA PAS. Who's that Black Guy R's talking to? Trying to persuade, I bet, that there are similarities between the québécoise and Black revolution.

"Yeah," says the Black guy. "I doubt it."

...

"Well," says R, getting ready to give him one of Mary's posters. (A good revolutionary never gives up.) "If you don't trust white revolutionaries, what about we artists?"

The Black tourist says: "You tell me: how would you treat me in a novel? Among other things, I bet at every mention you'd state my colour." (78)

A Quebec nationalism that forgets the province's own history of racial oppression, including slavery, and identifies its aspirations with those of disenfranchised African Americans, Third World postcolonials, and oppressed women is mocked on a bucolic mountain pavilion. The stranger, whose meander through Montreal lays down another set of tracks through *Heroine*, objects to the expedient political analogy. This is not the kind of "convulsive" beauty that the group wishes to trigger, and the protagonist, as a female Anglo, is marginal enough in this group to discern the ironies. "I step back in the trees, unable to bear another contradiction" (78). She has to "step back" in the figurative sense as much as the literal. Her politics alter with her gait.

The protagonist recovers the sensation of freedom that William Hazlitt had identified in 1821 as the dominant trait of walking in the earliest English essay on the subject, "On Going a Journey" (136-38). However idyllic, this freedom is not incompatible with her collectivist commitments, divided as they may be. The limited, in many respects "negative," liberty she attains in the concluding sections of the novel inheres in her pedestrian adroitness. That liberty is never wholly free of social entanglements and ironies, as the dissolution of her love affair underscores. She had admired how a free-spirited girlfriend strutted down Saint Catherine Street, "her mysterious smile and a way of walking well back (so that the pelvis protrudes) on her flat-heeled shoes, indicating certain women never never never will be slaves" (149). The facetious allusion to "Rule Britannia" redounds upon her when, a year later, she spots her unfaithful lover striding hand in hand with this same all-too-free spirit.

"This is a boot city" (78), she declares, yet dons soft soles that allow her to prowl and register the city's textures through the soles of her feet. At the end of the novel she gads along the Main in damp sneakers that make her conscious of the pedestrian performance of gender: "The heroine keeps walking. Wondering why a woman can't get what she wants without going into business on every front. Social, political, economic, domestic. Each requiring a different way of walking, a different way of talking" (184). In

Heroine, the woman talks in two languages and walks in several. She adjusts her gait according to the changing terrain, a nimbleness that bodes well for her adaptability to the various affordances of the city, where she must be able to alter her gait from detached loiterer to involved republican possibly within the span of a single block. She does not have to choose between submission to restrictively gendered state ordinances or indulgence in private fantasies of unencumbered personal autonomy. She can reach both places on foot, because the pedestrian elation in part originates in the confidence that they occupy the same ground.

Frank Davey argues that, in leaving her bathtub to stride out into the city, G. S.'s bid for "heroinism" "no longer has political content; it has become merely an individual's 'brave' attempt to continue to live—to leave a bathtub, or take a mundane walk outside one's home" (69). This overlooks the inherent political content in female pedestrianism, which strides against the gendered curtailments to mobility that organize urban space, constraints that also determine women's footwear in the period the novel describes. In reference to *Heroine*, Lianne Moyes notes: "Whereas a man's movement, his capacity to exercise his gaze, and his presence in the city is a function of his anonymity and invisibility, a woman's limited movement, her inability to return his gaze, and her historical absence (invisibility) in the city, can be understood as a function of her visibility" ("Introduction" 8). Ellen Servinis notes that, in Scott's work, pedestrian randomness "signifies differently for women in the city" (149). The eponymous *Heroine* anticipates Lydia in *Main Brides*, who, Servinis notes, "inhabits and reflects a part of Montreal that defies easy categorizations and eludes unitary notions of identity or of the city itself" (150).

Janet Wolff and Deborah L. Parsons, among other scholars, have denied the historical existence of the female *flâneur* (see Wolff 45; Parsons 4); Griselda Pollock insists that "there is not and could not be a female *flâneuse*" (71). Yet writers like Scott, not only in *Heroine* but in *Main Brides* and *My Paris*, adopt the category, with the republican ictus of George Sand's iron-shod heels. Implicitly claiming to be *une flâneuse* reclaims a bipedal dignity from gender stereotype.

The public exercise of private "negative" liberty has a cumulative force that this novel, like all those here examined, traces. Scott's heroine is a postmodern "character-in-progress," Nicole Markotic notes (38), but so too is Montreal; the city shapes and is shaped by ambulatory passage. Scott calls her *flâneuse* a "'writing subject' in-the-feminine. Not the self as a (feminist or

otherwise) predetermined figure, but a complex tissue of texts, experience, evolving in the very act of writing” (*Spaces* 11). The negative freedom from state interference and the positive freedom of participation in the *res publica* match stride at the level of Scott’s street. “I say nothing,” Scott’s later *flâneuse* declares of her detached yet receptive immersion in *My Paris*: “Wanting to stay afloat. To stay out of categories. Moving back and forth. Across comma of difference. A gerund. A gesture” (107). Freedom to roam the metropolis depends on the success of civic actors like Scott’s heroines to cut across differences to claim and thus spatially modify the city through their surveying step.

5. Aggress

The pedestrians of *Ruelles*, *The City’s Gates*, *Around the Mountain*, *Beautiful Losers*, and *Heroine* attempt to walk away from the constraints of class, sex, language, and ethnicity without denying their force or dispelling their dignity. In *Cockroach*, it may be easier to walk away from one’s species than from one’s race. Rawi Hage’s nightwalker is a refugee from the civil war in Lebanon, where he thieved and intrigued. His penchant for walking in his adopted Montreal is one externalization of a repetition compulsion that determines his fate. Having botched a vendetta that cost his sister’s life in their Lebanese town, he now conspires with the Iranian refugee Shohreh to exact vengeance on the putative officer, residing now in Montreal, who raped and tortured her in one of the Ayatollah’s prisons. Hage’s inadvertent *flâneur* has limited access to Isaiah Berlin’s negative liberty and almost none to the positive variety.

The author of *De Niro’s Game* and *Carnival*, which concerns a taxi driver, Hage has created an émigré Travis Bickle, an anti-hero whose homicidal fantasies of becoming an armed catcher in the rye are acted out in the winter city. Hage’s underground man, who like Dostoyevsky’s yearns to identify himself with the cockroaches that silently swarm his tenement in the dark, circulates among Middle Eastern and North African émigrés. He loiters with intent, trespassing and stalking shoppers, restaurant patrons, an Iranian government official, an Algerian professor, and even the court-appointed psychiatrist who is treating him in the aftermath of attempted suicide.

Meanwhile, his apparently aimless confinement largely within regulated public space coincides with his precarious status as a *méteque*: although fluently bilingual in the “official” state languages, the designations “English” and “French” are palpably denied him; though a Christian, he is subject to Muslim stereotyping; and though a beneficiary of a federal system of

universal welfare entitlement, he is tacitly refused assimilation into such sovereign imaginaries as "the people" or "*le peuple*" (see Olson 123). The latter terms are neither necessarily synonymous in Canada nor, to Québécois nationalists, even compatible. This anonymous walker is more at ease with an unassimilated ethnic denomination—the "foreigner"—that declines the hyphenated citizenship of federally mandated multiculturalism (see Harel).

The peripatetic English writer Iain Sinclair calls ours the age not of the *flâneur* but of the stalker: "walking with a thesis, with a prey" (75). The stalker, he notes, is "a stroller who sweats, who knows where he is going but not necessarily why" (75). The stalker is also both utterly self-absented (leaving no tracks) and predatorily present, an expeditionary, like Sophie Calle pursuing a stranger through Venetian alleys (Italian *calle*) in the performance piece *Suite vénitienne*, her gendered riposte to the masculine tracker, from Poe's "Man of the Crowd" to Vito Acconci's *Following Piece*. What Benjamin said of Hessel's Berlin applies equally to Hage's Montreal: "Here rather than in Paris one understands how the *flâneur* could part company with the philosophical walker and acquire the features of the werewolf, restlessly prowling in the social wilderness" ("Die Wiederkehr" 420).⁵ To be human, Hage's creature must first become animal. The difference from Benjamin is the descent from romanticized mammalian predator to Kafkaesque vermin, where the distinction between figurative and literal senses blurs.

Hage's diasporic malingerer, who collects welfare and later becomes a dishwasher in a Persian restaurant, has a paired means to assert himself in the dual space: to write and to walk. The novel sustains a dodgy pedestrian enunciation. Not content to answer compliantly the therapist's questions and walk the straight and narrow, he follows his own plot and path—into private dwellings and even into other people's shoes. It is not by means of therapy but by errancy that the narrator hopes to regain command of his own narrative; the talking cure accedes to the walking cure. In contrast, however, to the other works discussed here, the narrative and peripatetic trajectory is not gressive but aggressive, not aimless meander but adversarial march.

The plot literally turns on its narrator's heels, each stage signalled by a particular pair of shoes. Emigration becomes a process of being disalced and gradually refitted for foreign terrain. Because the narrator lacks boots during the winter that spans the novel, footwear properly becomes vibrant matter for this interloper—an entity modifying another entity in an interfolding assemblage of energies and bodies (see Bennett 111-17). In soggy loafers he glares at "heavy boots" treading invulnerably through the slush (Hage 8),

covets a venerable pair of officer's boots, envies the "well-mannered feet" of a bourgeois couple (89), and, like Charles Bovary arrested by the row of shoes tidied by Mademoiselle Emma in her father's vestibule, marks the "two pairs of shoes neatly placed side by side" in the invaded professor's basement flat (149). He is able to recognize his psychiatrist in the street by her shoes.

The therapy is suspended when he insolently confides to the psychiatrist that he broke into her condominium and filched her slippers. Without proper shoes he lacks the footing to execute vengeance on the purported Iranian torturer, so he bargains illicitly for the boots of a British officer, a Royal Military accoutrement resonating with echoes of the Levantine Protectorate. He nicks the boots from the officer's widow: "Anyhow, the old lady's husband stole everything from the Indians, or the Chinese. Maybe he paid nothing, or very little" (41). Like Ralph Ellison's eponymous invisible man thieving the current from Con Edison to illuminate his Harlem barrow, the narrator disguises self-interest as restitution, claiming that he wants "the stolen treasure put back where it belongs, in the underground" (42). The shoes give him needed impetus after his bout of suicidal despair: "Then I ran down the stairs and out of the building and walked above the earth and its cold white crust, feeling warm and stable" (253). On the icy streets friction is no mere figure of speech: "The grips of my boots' soles anchored me more firmly than ever in the soil hidden beneath the street's white surfaces" (257). The telluric energies beneath the frozen pavement course through his body and impel his close conspiracy with the Iranian refugee.

These shoes take the émigré along the city's third spaces, including a Persian restaurant, a Mediterranean café, a welfare office, the old port, and along the sidewalks that connect them. Listening in *Cockroach* extends from different languages to different surfaces. In the rain he hears "the tempo of my wet feet" (287); he attends to the impact of boots on sludge, the swish of slippers over pine floorboards, and high heels "clacking along the street" (298). Just about any space can resonate in this novel of insect echolocation. His turf is the resonant Main, where so many of Montreal's pedestrian narrators botanize on the pavement, as Benjamin described the *flâneur*. A Lebanese Christian like Hage, the narrator is both resident alien and ideally mobile Montrealer: like many older Quebecers, he too was educated by French nuns; he is a fluently bilingual subject who also, as an Arab man, has that outsider's perspective that, paradoxically, even Quebec's dominant social groups arrogate to themselves (Francophones as a Canadian minority, Anglophones as a Quebec minority).

Cockroach is directed against the flattering pieties of federal multiculturalism and Quebec's more ambiguous "*interculturelle*" policy that would soon polarize social groups during the Pauline Marois government, when, in a controversial bid to shore up political support in conservative francophone regions of the province, her Parti Québécois tabled mandatory secularization (*laïcité*) legislation, modelled on France's calamitous policy. The law, which the recently elected Coalition Avenir Québec government of François Legault vows to enact, would ban conspicuous ("*ostentatoire*") religious garb and pendants by civil servants and educators, while the crucifix would continue conspicuously to hang from the provincial legislature, L'Assemblée nationale. The novel depicts pockets of immigrant groups stagnating in the interstices of the French and English societies. Some are obliged cynically to trade on their vulnerability to gain the charity of self-serving liberals, whose inclusive idealism is flattered with an image of Canada's improving influence on the lives of refugees of authoritarian regimes and "failed" States (see Libin).

In a novel whose dominant trope is of intrepid cockroach tenacity, the narrator manoeuvres in the fissures between social groups and languages. More like the metamorphosing heroes of *The Thousand and One Nights* than Gregor Samsa, the protagonist revels in an unsustainable identification with the despised vermin. Even after he murders the Iranian official and his bodyguard at the Persian restaurant, he persists in imagining himself making an escape down the kitchen drain as a cockroach. The novel pointedly does not divulge where he washes up, since he really has no place to go.

The sound of the narrator's voice is not more insistent than the sound of his wet feet over the snow. What he hears through the "crunchy white crust that breaks and cracks under your feet" is the acoustics of the underworld, realm of the cockroach, of the Id, and of the dead: "It is something that comes out from underground and then stays at the surface" (127). Here is another language, that of the urban underworld after hours. "My feet had a different rhythm than usual for them, and I was not sure if this was because the snow was different, the ice less squeaky, or if it was I who was not in harmony" (157). The snowbanks impeding him, he attempts "walking to another rhythm," only to find a liberating alternative pace in these very obstacles: "I felt that the cleaned-up paths were disruptive, hindering me from creating a perfect harmonious rhythm from my breath and the falling city lights" (157-58). What he thus registers, with an eloquence that the vicissitudes of speech between state representatives and refugee claimant

often thwarts, is the discord between foreign figure and alienating ground. Even more than his coerced language of testimony to state agents, the narrator's constrained bipedal reverberations do not align with the civic, administered, and existential thoroughfares of the ambivalently hospitable emigrant city (see Harel 129). Only once he assumes a fatalistic pace does the narrator achieve, at sickening cost, a sinister peace with his surroundings. At a "crossroads" his feet lead him, oblivious to the cold, not to Shohreh's apartment or the bars on the Main, but, "for no reason," to the old port, which yields him a pedestrian epiphany of mortal migrancy: "Maybe we, like elephants, walk towards our chosen burials" (160). He has emigrated not to better his life but "to better my death" (160).

Seduced by misleading personal symmetries that pathologically heal the impotent failure of his earlier scheme to murder his brother-in-law, the narrator conspires in Shohreh's revenge fantasy. When she sends him back to his tenement in the middle of an icy night, he refuses her offer of cab fare.

I wanted to walk and hear crushing sounds under my feet again. Night is the only time when one can impose one's own sounds on the world. In the absence of wolves' howls, hyenas' laughs, nightbirds' songs, and a full moon, it was up to a human to make noises, to fill the void. But the snow was soft. My steps were muffled. It was quiet, so quiet that I felt as if I did not walk but instead crawled in silence. (249)

The desired homology between walking and enunciation is both sustained and jeopardized by this winter. The foot leaves tracks but dampens the step. Desire for a self-affirming stomp and retaliatory "crushing" is not gratified. He notes diurnal effects (a moonless sundown), the rhythm of his step (muffled), and the effect of weather (crisp fresh snow). And shod now in a British officer's boots, he both symbolically rehearses the Protectorate that succeeded the Ottomans in the eastern Levant and symbolically overthrows it. The boots are a reminder that the root of sabotage is French footwear, *le sabot*, clog pitched into the cogs of machinery. His nihilism both prospers in Montreal's third space and mocks complacent notions of its touted hospitality.

Durable footwear is thus sufficient to power a story that circulates over compactly organized yet porous social strata. The shoe sole alters the imprint of all these narratives. Walking becomes a signature, but it is not the singular authenticating step charted by security agencies, nor the State-flattering spoor-track of harmonized intercultural migration; instead it is a medley of gaits depending on gradient, surface, and weather. Nothing is long generalized or permitted to remain an untested abstraction.

Walkers accede to a finite, exposed, successive, and linear subjectivity, and without retrenchment in Romantic idealism transform these constraints, not unproblematically, into limited freedoms. The step leads them into spaces that slowness deepens into place. In an age of spatial compression and temporal acceleration, where time is a pre-eminently valued commodity, space is reaffirmed through an embodied politics and poetics. All paths the strolling Montreal story takes wend towards altered notions of civic participation. The rovers may be anonymous and unsponsored subjects on the bummel from the encroachments of social identity and State categories, yet equally they belong to an informal civilian militia made up of those who patrol its liberties and modify its contours.

NOTES

- 1 "Flânerie invites one to link together public spaces by strolling, zigzagging aimlessly, without purpose, armed with flared senses, acuity, full subjectivity, in a way that engages one's function as a perceiving machine, bumping against places as well, since *the body unites us with things*, as Merleau-Ponty wrote." Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.
- 2 "I like to think that the key verb of my venture is *flânoting*, which to the ear links *flâne* to note-taking."
- 3 "Hier geht man nicht wo, sondern wohin. Es ist nicht leicht für unsereinen" (Hessel 26).
- 4 "In walking, women can show all but without revealing anything."
- 5 "Hier und nicht in Paris versteht man, wie der Flaneur vom philosophischen Spaziergänger sich entfernen und die Züge des unstet in der sozialen Wildnis schweifenden Werwolfs bekommen konnten." See also Benjamin, 416-55.

WORKS CITED

- Badiou, Alain, et al. *What Is a People?* Translated by Jody Gladding, Columbia UP, 2016.
- Balzac, Honoré de. "Théorie de la démarche." *Flâner à Paris*, edited by Thierry Paquot and Frédéric Ross, Infolio, 2016, pp. 37-94.
- Beaumont, Matthew. *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*. Verso, 2015.
- Beneventi, Domenic. "Lost in the City: The Montreal Novels of Régine Robin and Robert Majzels." *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities*, edited by Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison, U of Toronto P, 2005, pp. 104-21.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedeman, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard UP, 1999.
- . "Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs." *Angelus Novus, Ausgewählte Schriften 2*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988, pp. 416-21.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke UP, 2010.
- Butler, Judith. "'We, the People': Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly." Badiou et al., pp. 49-64.
- Calle, Sophie. *Suite vénitienne*. Translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hatfield, Bay, 1984.
- Careri, Francesco. *Walkscapes: Camminare come pratica estetica*. Einaudi editore, 2006.
- Carpentier, André. *Ruelles, jours ouvrables: flâneries en ruelles montréalaises*. Boréal, 2005.

- Chisholm, Dianne. "Paris, *Mon Amour*, My Catastrophe, or Flâneries through Benjaminian Space." Moyes, *Gail Scott*, pp. 152-207.
- Cohen, Leonard. *Beautiful Losers*. McClelland & Stewart, 1991.
- Davey, Frank. "Totally Avant-Garde Woman: *Heroine*." Moyes, *Gail Scott*, pp. 52-71.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendell, U of California P, 1988.
- Debord, Guy. "Theory of the Dérive." Knabb, pp. 62-66.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. Minuit, 1975.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- D'Souza, Aruna, and Tom McDonough, editors. *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Manchester UP, 2006.
- Dubé, Peter. *The City's Gates*. Cormorant, 2012.
- Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2016.
- Gatti, Hilary. *Ideas of Liberty in Early Modern Europe: From Machiavelli to Milton*. Princeton UP, 2015.
- Gros, Frédéric. *A Philosophy of Walking*. Translated by John Howe, Verso, 2014.
- Hage, Rawi. *Cockroach*. Anansi, 2008.
- Harel, Simon. "Monolingualism and Plural Narratives: The Translation of Suffering in the Language of the City." Translated by Carmen Ruschiesky. *Speaking Memory: How Translation Shapes City Life*, edited by Sherry Simon, McGill-Queen's UP, 2016, pp. 117-41.
- Hazlitt, William. "On Going a Journey." *Selected Writings*, edited by Ronald Blythe, Penguin, 1982, pp. 136-47.
- Hessel, Franz. *Spazieren in Berlin*. Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2012.
- Hood, Hugh. *Around the Mountain*. Peter Brown, 1976.
- Hou, Jeffrey. "(Not) Your Everyday Public Space." *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, edited by Hou, Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-18.
- Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge, 2011.
- . *Lines: A Short History*. Routledge, 2007.
- Iverson, Douglas. "'A Reader's Guide to the Intersection of Time and Space': Urban Spatialization in Hugh Hood's *Around the Mountain*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* vol. 23, no. 1, 1998, pp. 343-59.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 1961. Random House, 1996.
- Knabb, Ken, editor and translator. *Situationist International Anthology*. Revised and expanded edition, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006.
- Lamonde, Yvan. *The Social History of Ideas in Quebec, 1760-1896*. Translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, McGill-Queen's UP, 2013.
- Libin, Mark. "Marking Territory: Rawi Hage's Novels and the Challenge to Postcolonial Ethics." *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2013, pp. 71-90.
- Markotic, Nicole. "Freedom's Just Another Word / for Nothin' Left to Close: Desire Constructing Desire Constructing in Gail Scott's *Heroine*." Moyes, *Gail Scott*, pp. 37-51.
- Moyes, Lianne. "Introduction: Cities Built from the Dreams of Women." *Tessera*, no. 16, 1994, pp. 6-12.
- , editor. *Gail Scott: Essays on Her Works*. Guernica, 2002.
- Munson, Elizabeth. "Walking on the Periphery: Gender and the Discourse of Modernization." *Journal of Social History* vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, pp. 63-75.

- Nicholson, Geoff. *The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, and Literature of Pedestrianism*. Riverhead, 2008.
- Olson, Kevin. "Conclusion: Fragile Collectivities, Imagined Sovereignties." Badiou et al., pp. 107-31.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford UP, 2000.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*. Routledge, 1988.
- Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie*. 1589. Edited by Edward Arber, Constable and Co., 1906.
- Rubenstein, Michael. *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial*. U of Notre Dame P, 2010.
- Sand, George. *My Life*. Translated by Dan Hofstadter, Harper and Row, 1979.
- Scott, Gail. *Heroine*. Mercury, 1988.
- . *Main Brides*. Coach House, 1993.
- . *My Paris*. Coach House, 1999.
- . *Spaces like Stairs*. Women's, 1989.
- Servinis, Ellen. "Urban Space and Barstool *flânerie* in Gail Scott's *Main Brides*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1998, pp. 137-52.
- Simon, Sherry. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2006.
- Sinclair, Iain. *Lights Out for the Territories*. Penguin, 2003.
- Soderstrom, Mary. *The Walkable City: From Haussmann's Boulevards to Jane Jacobs' Streets and Beyond*. Véhicule, 2008.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Studies*. Verso, 1989.
- Speck, Jeff. *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time*. North Point, 2014.
- Wolff, Janet. "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity." *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 3, 1985, pp. 37-46.

