

1. **Time:** Tonight
Place: In bed
Action: Before falling asleep, mentally retrace the paths you have taken today.
2. **Time:** Tomorrow at noon
Place: The high street
Action: Whilst walking, suddenly and without warning, stop. Remain still for five minutes, before continuing on your way.
3. **Time:** This Friday, 3pm
Place: The traffic lights
Arrive: When the green man appears, wait. When the red man appears, wait, when the green man appears, wait. When the red man appears, wait. When the green man appears, go.
4. **Time:** Every day this week
Place: Starbucks
Action: Whilst walking past, turn towards the window and peer in, before walking on.
5. **Time:** Saturday at Noon
Place: At the foot of the tallest building
Action: Stand as close to the building as possible whilst looking up to the top of it.
6. **Time:** Within the next 24 hours
Place: Somewhere that holds personal significance
Action: Take the time to imagine yourself somewhere else or with someone else.
7. **Time:** Next Saturday at dusk
Place: The front of the city hall
Action: Assemble facing towards the steps. Fix your gaze and remain completely still.
8. **Time:** Next Saturday at dawn
Place: At the harbour
Action: Assemble at the water's edge. Wait before further action.
9. **Time:** 6pm, Monday
Place: The monument
Action: Visualise a line that bisects the very centre of the city. Run the length of this line.
10. **Time:** Midnight
Place: The hospital
Action: Stand holding your breath for as long as possible. Then exhale loudly, catch your breath and run away.



7. **Time:** Next Saturday at dusk
Place: The front of the city hall
Action: Assemble facing towards the steps. Fix your gaze and remain completely still.



8. **Time:** Next Saturday at dawn
Place: At the harbour
Action: Assemble at the water's edge. Wait before further action.

9. **Time:** 6pm, Monday
Place: The monument
Action: Visualise a line that bisects the very centre of the city. Run the length of this line.



Open City is an interdisciplinary art project involving artists Andrew Brown and Katie Doubleday, working in collaboration with other artists and writers including art-writer Emma Cocker. It is an investigation-led project that attempts to draw attention to how behaviour in the public realm is organized and controlled – and to what effect – whilst simultaneously exploring how such 'rules' or even habits might be negotiated differently through performance-based interventions.



Open City

www.open-city-project.blogspot.com
www.pay-attention-to-the-footnotes.blogspot.com
www.performing-communities.com

Supported by Nottingham Trent University

Photograph Credits:
 Julian Hughes, Andrew Brown, June Gillert,
 Victoria Smith, Peter Ronald & Beth Bramich

1.

The act of walking across any city is not a neutral gesture, nor is it one that goes unobserved. The pavement traced, the corner cut, the square circled, the line crossed, the wrong turn mistaken, the blind alley turned a blind eye to, the dead-end dreaded causing quick and uneasy return. It is all too easy to stop attending to the nature of these daily decisions; to choices weighed up, instructions obeyed and strayed from, to routines that somehow build and are played out each day after day after day.¹ Before long our irresponsible steps are taken care of by others. Unseen shepherds herd us sheep-like through the spaces of the city as though we were daydreaming or in partial sleep. We are perhaps too willing to place trust in our uninvited guides, to forfeit our intuition and forget how we ever made our way without their help. We are forgetting to look in lieu of being told. Like good children we stick to the map and follow the arrows.² Gradually we might abandon our capacity for aimless wandering, lose our individual sense of direction in favour of authorised routes and assisted navigation.³ The city is closing its secrets to us. We must now try to remember its spells. ‘Open city! Open Sesame!’⁴

2.

There are hidden rules that determine how to cross the city; coded orders issued on how to behave, move and interact. Dawdle or meander in the busiest thoroughfare to reveal the fierceness of these unspoken bylaws.⁵ Fall still as a rock on the riverbed, as the flow of feet stream past in their forever forward surge. Like civic statues the static body acts as silent witness; a mute commemorator, a figure temporally distanced from the hurried and surrounding throng. A stilled crowd is the harbinger of a potential action poised or the lamented residue of some event since past. Experience the anticipatory queue gathering force or those morbid formations curiously congealed around sites of local catastrophe.⁶ Here, inaction is a dynamic form of stillness that quivers palpably like the video-screen paused awaiting play; charged as skin waiting to be touched.⁷ Conceived as a totality, the city can be imagined as a unit of activity not unlike the body or a machine; its momentum fuelled by the never failing current of individual motion, the perennial rhythm of the everyday.⁸ Stasis thus signals a crisis in this system as the cogs lock, the pulse stalls, the motor crashes.⁹ Yet such crisis provokes reflection or decision without which a change to habitual routine need not be imagined.¹⁰ Pause is a critical gesture; without stillness, movement forward will inevitably falter.

3.

Routine is the grey fog glided into as though by pilots hypnotised by the Ganzfeld mirages of its featureless horizons.¹¹ Sung like a lullaby it beckons the eyes to slowly close upon the world; lulls the fevered imagination towards involuntary and perpetual slumber. Enter cautiously the incessant mist or ceaseless miasma. Pay attention to your daily journeys and their subtlest landmarks, for you can never be certain when you may need to retrace your steps. Reclaim the lost art of observation from the machinic gaze of surveillance technologies, from the panoptic watch of CCTV.¹² Observe your surroundings with microscopic curiosity or the insurgent wonder of a child. Practice with due care though, for the act of scrutiny is a highly nuanced endeavour, performed along a spectrum of encounter spanning across objective distance to the most intimate proximity. Look to others for guidance for there are still those who have not abandoned this disappearing craft.¹³ Present in the coquettish obsession of a lover’s gaze during games of seduction, it is also the process played out in the most rigorous scientific methodology, in the forensic search for missing clues. Inhabit these different viewing positions and ways of seeing. Now meet a stranger’s eye and note how they respond to the precision of your newly practiced glance.

4.

Curious transactions are played out in the public realm. To step in someone’s shadow is an ambiguous gesture of fascination and critique; a subversive form of mimicry that blurs the boundary between self and non-self.¹⁴ Performed as a means of willful disorientation or of disruptive sabotage, it calls for reciprocal possession or disappearance where the individual is lost in or to the unfamiliar footsteps of another.¹⁵ Trespass attentively in a stranger’s shadow. Somehow sacrosanct, it is our secular soul; our indelible echo, our ethereal twin. Be wary then of the midday sun – this hour of noonday ghosts – for without our shadow we are lost like Peter Pan. To lose it is to become one, for ‘only shadows don’t cast shadows.’¹⁶ Follow another and become their shadow; momentarily bridge the threshold of one’s own form.¹⁷ Escape. Erase oneself in the uncertainty of another’s tread. Vanish. Selfhood vanquished to the call of space. Camouflage oneself in the city’s shadows, or in the shadow of the person followed. Allow time to become imperceptible and dissolve into space with detective stealth.¹⁸ Close your eyes to your own itinerary. Identify your new beacon, your man of the crowd.¹⁹ Change direction on the impulse of another’s instruction. Forget what you were doing. Leth-like, lose yourself in the present moment.²⁰ Abandon your destination to your desire to be led astray.

5.

Now drop below the radar of the visual, beneath the cartographer’s contour and the bureaucrat’s grid.²¹ Down here at ground level the city is encountered through the logic of a different system of narration; its stories voiced in the language of more marginal and experiential translations. Wandering disrupts the dominant optical orientation of mapping – the static, atemporal form of spatiality through which a place is officially described – by drawing attention to the way in which space is always under construction and understood by the range of senses and not only through sight. At close range it is no longer possible to visually experience the city as a map. It must be registered through another sensory order; it must be felt. Close your eyes, and allow your feet to read the streets as though they were braille, as though they were a musical score.²² Pay attention to its orchestral patterns and invisible tempo: to the repeated rhythms and staccato breaks, interludes, capricious ruptures, to the melody of wear played out and manifest in heavy palimpsest and notations along the margins. Construct a way of speaking back, as an echo or vibration drawn and performed through your body. Choreograph your reply as a silent eulogy, to others who have walked along this way.

6.

Sense of place occurs then at the juncture between space and time. Spatiality can be conceived as a model of mobility and motion, or of transience and transitivity that can be both played out and punctured through.²³ Lived experience is narrated through a language of stratification and depth; or imagined as an archaeological structure. Construct of its own occupation, place is a site of séance where all its histories collide.²⁴ It is the meeting point between past and present; whilst a ‘non-place’ is the empty void whose history has been bleached out, erased or is still yet to come.²⁵ Reflect on the journeys that have criss-crossed the site at which you now stand. Tune in to its bandwidth of inhabitation; conjure the ghosts of your coordinates. Wandering is a tactic through which a contingent or relational notion of place can be retrieved and even instigated; where unauthorised versions of reality – emerging at the interstices of memory, anecdote and lived experience – might elude the flat and static visuality of the map.²⁶ Now visualise the route that your own life has taken. Plot it as an imaginary itinerary or mental map. Carve your history in illogical footsteps across the fabric of the city or as footnotes to its text.²⁷ Score its surface with the scrawl of your itinerant epitaph. Walk your signature into the places in which you dwell.

7.

Pause then. Attend to the stillness of the public realm – those clustered groups gathered impassively in lines or squares, lone lovers impatiently anticipating the advent of another, the sorry standstill of sightseers who have lost their way. Stillness is always more than it seems, a habit of camouflage that refuses to give much away.²⁸ Yet under scrutiny, still waters run deep.²⁹ Contrast the inaction of the habitually unmoved or (e)motionless with the sudden and unsettling hiatus felt when something stops you dead in your tracks. Standing to attention always drifts towards lethargic distraction or careless daydreaming in time, the much-awaited immobility of pleasurable interlude – a performance willingly suspended. Muscles tensed in inflexible contraction inescapably yield to the demands of gravity, unable to resist exhaustion’s tireless pull.³⁰ Inability to act can signal a form of resignation, the passive and acquiescent acceptance of the seemingly inevitable. Alternatively, failure to move is a defiant gesture of protest or refusal where digging in one’s heels is a tactic for persistently remaining (still) against the odds.³¹ To be static then means to be inert or incapacitated, yet it also has the potential to conjure from nowhere the force of hidden energies, unexpected powers. (In)still breaks in the liquid rhythm of habitual flows, by affecting the spacing of a missed beat, a temporal opening into which to imagine things other than what they are.³² Make stillness a foil for infinite and limitless action.

8.

Waiting is an episode of time in which the quickening pulse of adrenalin and slow rhythm of boredom struggle to conduct the pace of passing hours.³³ It is the threshold across which the future is conjured; the interminable limbo of all adolescent dreams, a chasm of pleasure and irritation into which the unspoken fantasies of the everyday might fall or take flight. Performed along a spectrum of expectation – from awaiting the familiar or recurring to anticipating the not-yet-known – the duration of waiting will always be too long and yet somehow never enough. Think of those involuntary moments of indecision before the unfulfilled wait is finally abandoned. Or recall the perennial experience of enforced waiting; that resentful limbo produced by another’s failure to arrive. However, waiting is also a tactic for deferring endlessly the disappointment of closure or of unwanted resolution.³⁴ An undefined or indefinite wait – when an end or outcome remains uncertain – creates a temporal vacuum or space of liminal non-production within which future action can still be imagined.³⁵ Hesitation waits for the propitious moment; a reflective interval within which to conceive a less predictable or predetermined future. Poised forever at a point of anticipation, waiting promises towards as yet undecided possibilities where one’s options are kept momentarily open or are left trembling in the balance.³⁶ Wait then. Stall. Bide your time. Practice a delay between stimulus and response; shift from the deliberate towards deliberation.

9.

Charting an escape route from expectation requires slowing down or stalling the rhythm of habitual routines at the same time as building capacity to respond with unexpected speed and intensity when the time is right.³⁷ Become attuned to the pressures of contradictory forces, skilful in the art of holding back (the familiar or repeated) whilst ushering in (the unforeseen, the still unknown). The tempo of unthinking repetition is a beguiling love song, a most insidious melody. Listen carefully and you will hear its beat stepped out in collective refrains along sidewalks, or indistinct in murmured drones, the humdrum harmony of multiple voices tethered to the tenor of a single tune. Improvisation is defense against melodious repetition, working across the logic of the recurring chorus; the conscious interruption of predictable flows.³⁸ To improvise is to conceive a counter rhythm (of being or behaving), by devising ways to resonate discordantly or at a different timbre. Working against the grain demands a degree of attentiveness; identification of alternative frequencies of opportunity already present within every familiar structure, the minding of gaps.³⁹ Spaces of possibility – yet too often the gaps are filled carelessly or in haste, as incessant chatter surfaces the holes of awkward silence. Or else they stay unnoticed like a dropped stitch. Find ways of extending the spaces of hesitancy between cause and effect, yet act swiftly and with intent for *kairos* is fleeting and disappears as quickly as it comes.⁴⁰

10.

The city is a promiscuous assemblage; a precarious gathering of disparate forces and fragmentary parts.⁴¹ More than a spatial or geographical terrain that can be named and known, every city has a mobile and mercurial architecture. Performed as choreography or an event, it is the unpredictable symphony of divergent rhythms coaxed into tentative co-existence, the promise of infinitely variable refrains.⁴² Herein, lies potential for an unfolding orchestration always on the cusp of a change in chord, ever receptive to new direction. Yet, true mobility should be practiced lightly, for whilst even the most flexible can seize without due care, agile structures become rigorous if over disciplined. Classification fixes the social city into immutable form, rendering community static and identities unchangeable. Definition is the art of eradicating ambiguity, clarifying blurred edges, the boundaries that separate and divide.⁴³ Set limits with caution, for like warmed gas the expanding city-space is volatile, knows no bounds. Devise tactics for releasing points of pressure, for loosening the habits of stiffened postures and resistant joints. Exercise a different routine daily; fail to fall into the shape of set ways. Identify common patterns of gathering and dispersal – the flood of rush hour, the insurgency of a swarming crowd – but perform them when least expected.⁴⁴ Find others with whom to flock freely, where synchronicities form spontaneously through affinity rather than conformity, each new move determined by the direction of the collective that is its own leader.⁴⁵

pay-attention-to-the-footnotes

Text by Emma Cocker, 2007 – 2010