Originally published in France in 1980 (and translated into English in 1984), Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* has assumed the status of an *ur-text* for many cultural studies academics and students. In particular, his chapter on ‘Walking in the City’ is often cited as a blueprint for understanding key terms in the cultural studies repertoire such as ‘power’ and ‘resistance’. This article revisits ‘Walking in the City’ in order to supplement some of the established understandings of his work circulating in the field of cultural studies, as well as the intersecting fields of cultural geography and urban studies. The paper begins by suggesting ways in which established understandings of Certeau’s work might be usefully rethought and extended through a consideration of differentiated instances of walking. Critiquing the account of body-subject relations posited by Certeau through reference to the writings of Marcel Mauss on techniques of the body and self, the author calls, in particular, for a greater consideration of the role of assemblages and affect in understanding everyday urban practices. By the conclusion of the article, the author arrives at a more nuanced understanding of the feedback loop between the body-subject and the city, and suggests ways in which Certeau’s writing on walking remains productive for those strains of cultural studies interested in the practices of an increasingly virtualized urban space.

**Keywords** Michel de Certeau; walking; everyday life; resistance; the city; the body; affect

Walking is a subject that is always straying.  
(Solnit 2000, p. 8)

As Meaghan Morris has commented, the theoretical reflections concentrated around Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) — particularly those concerned with walking as an act of enunciation (in his chapter on ‘Walking in the City’) and his closely related ‘strategies’/‘tactics’ distinction — have in different guises ‘been one of the most influential models for cultural studies in recent years’ (Morris 1998, p. 110). In particular, Certeau’s work has provided a touchstone for those critics engaging with the range of practices that fall under the umbrella of ‘cultural consumption’. For
these critics, ‘Walking in the City’ offers a persuasive theoretical framework for understanding the temporal and spatial operations of popular culture, especially in terms of audience practices. With some notable exceptions, however, ‘Walking in the City’ has been poorly attended to in that established but relatively marginal subset of cultural studies work that is interested in the experience of contemporary urban space. This curious imbalance suggests that despite generally widespread reference to Certeau, as cultural studies scholars we have tended to deploy his notion of everyday life in relation to a relatively fixed set of co-ordinates. Thus, while ‘Walking in the City’ may appear to be a critically exhausted text whose bones have been picked over one too many times, my contention is that revisited from an urban studies perspective Certeau’s might provoke new kinds of engagements for scholars — engagements oriented much more firmly to the ways in which bodies, subjects and built environments are interlinked and enmeshed.

The following discussion of Certeau has its origins in a much larger ongoing study; a project that employs cultural studies debates about ‘the everyday’ in order to analyse multi-local (Australian) city practices and sites in terms of what they reveal about the mediatized nature of contemporary urban experience. Part of that consideration of ‘the everyday’ posits a move away from a rationale, methodology and theoretical apparatus too closely aligned with the European critical tradition of making the ordinary ‘extraordinary’ (from its Surrealist to its Situationist incarnations), to an analysis of the much more self-conscious invocations and discursive rhetoric of what I term the ‘extraordinary everyday’ in critical and popular descriptions and discussions of contemporary (urban and non-urban) cultural formations. In what ways has the ‘extraordinary everyday’ been transformed from an arty, avant-garde practice of critical intervention and revelation responding to the post-war culture of consumption and spectacle, into a much more banal and/or popular organizing trope frequently employed to describe and make sense of quite disparate current urban cultures and experiences. Exploring this question, I argue, offers us vital insights into the distinctive nature and contours of the contemporary (extraordinary) everyday.

The ‘concrete’ object anchoring my discussion of the ‘extraordinary everyday’ in that broader project is a range of differentiated practices of walking and their related contexts. The initial case studies included a casino-entertainment complex, a central city walking trail designed to memorialize indigenous-colonial relations, and a televised gay and lesbian parade. The practices of walking associated with such sites and events are, at one level, manifestly different and multiple: for instance, the discussion of the walking trail is interested in practices of just ‘passing by’ as well as simulations of indigenous practices of ‘walkabout’, while the casino entertainment complex simultaneously involves a grounding in the here-and-now of sticky carpet as well as the virtual meanderings that are encouraged within a globalized
architecture of entertainment. While Certeau’s account of ‘walking in the city’ is a crucial orientation and departure point for this broader project it also presents a paradox that requires revisiting and rethinking: in a nutshell, that paradox is found in Certeau’s own tightrope walk between a universalizing meta-model and definition of everyday practice, and his own admission that such practices are at one level defined by their infinite multiplicity. My contention is that too much work in (urban) cultural studies leans toward emphasizing the former rather than the latter and, accordingly, my interest here is in constructing an analytical framework (via Certeau and others) which steers us away from what Meaghan Morris (1990) has described as the critical temptation to be “‘sucked in” . . . by “singularity”’ (p. 15). Put another way, instead of providing a universalizing model for everyday ‘walking in the city’ — or talking about the politics of walking in an overly simplistic fashion (e.g. as a singular mode of ‘resistance’) — I provide suggestions in this article as to how we might conceptualize and write about the multiplicities of an exemplary everyday practice (walking) in an urban context.

**Walking as ‘resistance’**

One of the key contributions made by Certeau to cultural studies stems from his focus on everyday life as being constituted by complex sets of practices and, in particular, his notion of praxis as a form of enunciation. Certeau’s central argument in terms of the enunciative nature of praxis is that space and place are not merely inert or neutral features of the built environment; instead, they must be activated by the ‘rhetorical’ practices of users and passers-by. He comments:

> if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g. by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g. by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.

(1984, p. 98)

Thus, for Certeau the rhetoric and performativity of walking ‘affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects etc., the trajectories it “speaks”’ (p. 99). The walker’s selection, rejection, manipulation (and so on) of spatial elements — which are memorably described by Certeau as the ‘chorus of idle footsteps’ — are further described by him in terms of formalized tropes
(synecdoche, asyndeton). It is the ‘turns’ and ‘detours’ of the walker that transform place into space.

Certeau’s rhetoric of walking moves towards a political dimension (the possibility of ‘transgressive’ acts), in his distinction between the vectors of power organizing urban space; that is, between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’. Certeau defines a strategy as

the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment’. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (prope) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, ‘clienteles’, ‘targets’, or ‘objects’ of research). Political, economic and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.

(1984, p. xix; see also pp. 36–8)

An example of a strategy might be that of a city park controlled by a local statutory authority. The park is a site officially circumscribed as a space for everyday leisure, a haven from traffic where particular modes of walking based around the aesthetic consumption of ordered ‘nature’, or healthy recreation and exercise, or even displays of heterosexual romance (walking hand-in-hand), take place. In contrast, a tactic is a practice that insinuates itself ‘into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance’ (p. xix). In this sense, argues Certeau, tactics depend fundamentally on an ‘art of timing’ (in contrast to the ‘proper’, which is a victory of space over time). Tactics require users to be ‘on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing”’ (p. xix). An example of a tactic, then, would be the use of city parks and their paths as ‘unofficial’ homosexual beats, sites for cruising, a practice of walking (already an appropriation of an official style, namely the police on patrol) and use of a particular space that runs against its dominant and ‘proper’ heteronormative construction. For Certeau, ‘tactical’ appropriations of space like this are an instance of ‘resistance’ to an official order, a victory of the weak over the strong.

The notion of ‘resistance’ has been a central concept in the cultural studies repertoire. In Culture: A Reformer’s Science (1998, p. 167), Tony Bennett comments that the term resistance ‘has received relatively little sustained theoretical attention, but has rather been taken on trust as “a good thing” and certainly “to be encouraged”’. He goes on to note that where some sort of theoretical antecedent or authorization needs to be invoked to justify the focus on ‘resistance’, it is most commonly supplied in recent cultural studies work with reference to Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life. However, following
on from Morris’s essay on ‘Banality in Cultural Studies’, Bennett cautions that too straightforward a notion of resistance leads to

an automatic theory generating an automatic politics, both of which, according to Meaghan Morris, had become, by the late 1980s, the banal by-products of a minor industry sustained ‘somewhere in some English publisher’s vault’ by ‘a master-disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations’.

(1998, p. 168)

According to Bennett, this blind acceptance of the concept of resistance has resulted in cultural studies becoming a discipline concerned with ‘tracking down resistances’ and, once it has found them, taking their side. This is not a call, however, to discard Certeau’s legacy that offers much of critical value; instead, as Bennett comments, it is a case of acknowledging that Certeau’s notion of resistance ‘has real limits which need to be respected’ (1998, p. 168).

The most important of these limits stem from Certeau’s opposition between ‘the official’ and ‘the everyday’, and his subsequently rigid differentiation between strategies and tactics. Social practices of walking rarely conform to this either/or model. It is never simply a case of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or individual walkers versus the city authorities who seek to organize the movement and dispositions of bodies in urban space, as Certeau’s model implies. The following two examples illustrate my point. The first is that of the now common ‘alternative’ maps of the city available to particular social groups or ‘users’ of urban space; for example, a ‘Gay and Lesbian Melbourne’ map that I recently picked up in a local café highlights ‘gay-friendly’ areas and precincts in the city. One interesting aspect of this representation is its identification of specific streets and public spaces where same-sex couples might feel safe in engaging (among other activities) in that ‘everyday’ act of walking hand-in-hand down the street. Such an act is, of course, a political one and still likely to attract abuse in many Australian streets. It is ‘resistant’ in so far as it challenges heteronormative constructions of ‘appropriate’ behaviour in public space. However, the fact that these spaces of ‘resistance’ have, to a certain extent, been mapped and codified, in this by case by a commercial alliance, suggests the operation of a more complicated order of power that is articulated through practices that are neither strictly compliant nor resistant.

As a second example, consider the way in which the public space of the street is appropriated and a community formed through different kinds of protest marches, typically those which march on a relevant, official site in the central city area (e.g. parliament buildings or other government offices).
Typically, these pre-planned events involve an appropriation of the entire street along the route of the march. The marchers participating are not confined by the pavement: they override traffic lights and ‘Cross Now’ signs at intersections along the route, and they challenge the sovereign right of the motorcar to dominate the space of the street. Yet can we really say, following Certeau, that this is an act of resistance of the same variant as that of gay couples walking (hand-in-hand) on the street? To equate all counter-official acts as practices of resistance is to flatten out the meaning of the term itself while erasing significant differences between social groups. Furthermore, it also ignores the ways in which the anti-establishment actions of street walkers are mediated by a myriad of intermediary or civic institutions, all existing in very different relationships to hegemonic culture. How, for example, does the culture of unions to some degree mediate the dispositions and behaviour of its members in protest marches? The general point to be made here, as Bennett comments, is that

individual’s itineraries are plotted and organized through and by their affiliations to a myriad of organizations whose operations are conducted at a sub-panoptic level: sporting clubs and associations, firms, charities, cultural societies and organizations, religious institutions, neighbourhoods. If we are to understand how cities are used by ordinary people in their everyday lives, we need to pay attention to the differentiated ways in which their relations to urban space are organized by the urban trajectories, maps and itineraries that arise from their differential relations to a range of economic, social and cultural associations and forms of life.


Accordingly, if we focus on the ways in which civic forms of culture ‘structure’ everyday acts, then the act of ‘queering’ the street discussed in my first example is not purely an act of unfettered resistance but, rather, is organized or given form both through its relation to official, heterosexual culture and through gay and lesbian community groups and businesses and their alternative mappings of urban space. Hence, for Bennett the creative walker championed by Certeau may ‘merely be following another order or, indeed, instituting such an order’ (p. 181).

An aporia exists then within current formulations of resistance in cultural studies and it is partially derived from Certeau’s characterization of practices of resistance around the binary categories of official/everyday culture and strategies/tactics. As Jeremy Ahearne (1995, pp. 188–9) argues, while Certeau does identify the existence of a politically charged space of process or cultural work located ‘between, say, political, pedagogical and urban programmes and what different people ‘make of’ these programmes’, he is
only able to vaguely hint at the complex intersection of power relations that structure such a space of process. Power in *The Practice of Everyday Life* tends to be depicted in a top-down fashion with the oppressed ‘man in the street’ pitted against the powers-that-be. As John Frow (1995, p. 56) observes, Certeau’s employment of figures such as ‘the ordinary man ... walking in countless thousands on the streets’ and ‘the people’ problematically elides any discussion of probable ‘struggles and rivalries between the groups comprising “the people”’. In addition, Certeau’s account does not recognize the possibility that there might be ‘complicity in and acceptance of domination’ on the part of the people (p. 56).6

As a corrective to reducing practices of walking such as parades, window shopping or tourist trails to a singular either/or model of resistance vs. compliance, I want to endorse Bennett’s call for ‘a fuller and richer cartography of the spaces between total compliance and resistance’ (1998, p. 169). Instead of simply relying on the binary distinctions implied by Certeau’s schema – or, between the pre-mapped strategies of urban disciplinary structures and the freedoms enjoyed by the everyday walker – I want to suggest that cultural studies analyses might be oriented more usefully toward producing a more vigorous and multi-dimensional account of the complex manner in which bodies, power, mobility and urban forms intersect within the contemporary city. Such an account, however, must not simply function as a ‘labelling exercise’ – here is one form of power, there is some resistance. Instead, such a mode of cultural description and analysis should also attempt to chart the relative ‘textures’ and ‘effectivities’ of the different power relationships under scrutiny.

What sort of model of power, however, might usefully supplement Certeau’s account of everyday practices? As a beginning, post-Gramscian cultural studies work around the related methodological notion of ‘articulation theory’ offers a particularly useful way of (re)conceptualizing the power-effects of everyday practices. Lawrence Grossberg provides a neat summation of this methodology:

The concept of articulation provides a useful starting point for describing the process of forging connections between practices and effects, as well as of enabling practices to have different, often unpredicted effects. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated to larger structures.

(Grossberg 1992, p. 54)

Importantly, though, we need to recognize the contingency of these moments of joining or articulation. In this sense, there is no such thing as an intrinsically oppressive practice or a resistant act: it is the nature of these acts’ articulation
to social formations and sites that finally determines their social effects. For example, the presence of crowds marching in the street and disrupting the circulation of motor vehicle traffic is not automatically ‘resistant’ in any sense but may produce anti-hegemonic effects through its articulation (through the mode of the protest march) to particular political struggles.

The concept of articulation thus allows a reformulation of Certeau’s characterization of the power differentials organizing the relations between everyday ‘users’ of the street and their various institutional ‘others’. It allows us to move beyond those strains of cultural studies that too simplistically deploy markers such as ‘resistance’, ‘oppression’ and so on, in relation to particular practices. In other words, the notion of articulation offers a means of avoiding the pitfalls of ‘essentializing’ Certeau’s account of walking. While Certeau eloquently demonstrates how everyday walking can indeed be ‘resistant’ it does not automatically follow on that we should read into his work a claim that all walking practices are somehow intrinsically resistant. Instead, we need to consider the various mediations that allow certain cultural practices like walking to articulate complex, perhaps even contradictory, effects. In the next section I argue that this notion of articulation can help frame understandings of how multiple configurations of walking as a bodily technique and walking as a mode of enunciation of a particular form of subjectivity are conjoined within particular contexts. For such a distinction will, I argue, allow us to produce a more nuanced account of the multiple walking practices that take place in the city (including, for example, drifting, marching, touring, window shopping) than is offered in Certeau’s model of ‘walking in the city’. In particular, I want to suggest that Marcel Mauss’s earlier work on bodily techniques can usefully supplement Certeau’s model in order to clarify and extend the latter’s own stated desire to investigate the practices responsible for ‘an ‘anthropological’, poetic and mythic experience of space’ (p. 93).

Techniques of walking

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau concludes his discussion and elaboration of the enunciative nature of walking as a practice with an unexpected and curious change of tack. He argues that the spatial enunciation produced through walking is a repetition, ‘in diverse metaphors’, of the originary experience of the child’s separation from the mother’s body. In making this claim, Certeau reminds the reader of both Freud’s paradigmatic *fort/da* analysis as well as Lacan’s famous account of the ‘mirror stage’ (pp. 108–9). As cultural geographer Steve Pile (1996) acknowledges in his commentary on Certeau – one framed within the context of a psychoanalytically informed account of the dialectics between the subject, society and space – this ending
to Certeau’s chapter initially seems both ‘bizarre (we are not led to expect this conclusion) and troubling (space is once again feminized)’ (p. 27). Pile concludes that while Certeau provides a useful partial account of aspects of the psychodynamics of place that essentially follows in the specialized footsteps of the flâneur he can’t, however, account for other practices of walking such as the patrols of police and soldiers or routines such as going to work, picking up children from school and shopping (p. 228). In contrast to Pile, I think that Certeau’s notion of praxis as enunciation is still helpful in terms of analysing these ‘other’ forms of walking; however, I concur with Pile that Certeau’s conclusion is troubling, but for different reasons (primarily concerned with its reliance on a psychoanalytic model) and in this section I want to suggest a ‘tactic’ for dealing with that problem through reference to the work of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

One of the main problems arising from Certeau’s work is that it is limited by its reliance on what Ian Hunter (1993) in a sustained commentary on Mauss has identified as a ‘fundamentally aesthetic or dialectical style of analysis [in respect of mind-body relations]’, a mode of analysis that, according to him, extends from Hegel through to cultural studies. Of relevance to my project here is Hunter’s identification of three features arising from this dialectical relation between subject and body. These can be summarized as: (1) the insistent unification of the mind (subjectivity) and the body; (2) the production of a notion of a single general relation between ‘body’ and ‘subjectivity’ in which ‘the mind’s will to control bodily desire (repression), and the body’s impulse for polymorphous satisfaction (perverse desire), reach an optimal reconciliation in the form of the controlled satisfaction of desire (sublimation)’(p. 176); and (3) the establishment of a social role for the intellectual through this dialectical relation — one concerned with giving voice ‘to the dumb resistance of the body’ (p. 176).

Certeau’s account of walking in the city, I want to argue here, is fundamentally based on these broader premises. That is, Certeau’s account of walking in the city assumes ‘a general dialectical relation between attributes that might . . . be identified as bodily or mental’ (Hunter 1993, p. 182), thereby implying at one level a universal relationship between the body and subjectivity, the body and society. These assumptions emerge in particular in the way Certeau repeatedly figures the walking body as existing in a singular, psychoanalytic relationship to subjectivity. The discourse of psychoanalysis, argues Hunter, is one of the most powerful recent universalizations of the mind-body dialectic as it problematically takes for granted an identification of desire with the body and the unconscious. Precisely this type of psychoanalytic framework is strongly endorsed by Certeau in the aforementioned conclusion to ‘Walking in the City’; however, it is also signalled earlier in the chapter in Certeau’s description (in which he cites Benveniste) of the movements or ‘figures’ employed in the rhetoric of walking that characterize
‘both a “symbolic order of the unconscious” and “certain typical processes of subjectivity manifested in discourse”’ (p. 102). Accordingly, for Certeau,

To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place . . . a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of spaces.

(1984, p. 103)

It is easy enough to think of pleasurable walking practices that exemplify this poetic and highly romantic sense of being unconsciously taken where one’s footsteps lead (for instance, a Sunday afternoon walk in an unfamiliar district of the city in which one lives). On the other hand, it also seems to be an unnecessarily limiting framework; in other words, the metaphors of ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ are simply not that helpful when considering a range of more regimented or functional instances of walking that are not primarily concerned with identity formation (e.g., the common everyday practice of going for a walk to ‘get some sun’ and ‘fresh air’ and generate some kind of feeling of corporeal well-being).

As Hunter argues, a useful corrective to the limits of the mind-body dialectic, as set up in Certeau’s psychoanalytically informed account of walking, is the work of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss and his notion of mind and body techniques. In his 1934 lecture ‘Techniques of the Body’ (1973), Mauss provides us with a starting point from which to consider the social processes of transmission and education in different modalities and culturally specific forms of walking. Mauss offers the following anecdote, which he describes as a ‘kind of revelation’ that he experienced in a hospital in New York:

I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realized that it was at the cinema. Returning to France I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema. This was an idea I could generalize. The position of the arms and hands while walking form a social idiosyncrasy, they are not simply a product of some purely individual, almost completely psychical arrangements and mechanisms. For example: I think I can also recognize a girl who has been raised in a convent. In general she will walk with her fists closed. And I can still remember my third-form teacher shouting at me: ‘Idiot! why do you walk around the whole time with your hands flapping wide open?’ Thus there exists an education in walking, too.¹⁰

(1973, p. 72)
Mauss’s anecdote points to the fact that the most basic and transparent of bodily actions and dispositions (for instance, walking, spitting, gazing, resting, etc.) have no neutral or ‘natural’ form but are always culturally and socially produced, often through mimetic processes.

The ‘bodily techniques’ that Mauss identifies as belonging to a particular realm of education and training (a realm like that inhabited by Certeau’s everyday practices – neither within nor outside the bounds of rational knowledge), are then articulated to different technologies of the self, or subjectivity. These techniques of the self were explored by Mauss (1985) in his essay, ‘A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self’. Hunter (1993, p. 180) argues that Mauss’s anthropological historicization of the notion of the person (produced through cultural institutions), and crucially distinguished from the individual (the raw unstructured biological entity), is in fact ‘a history of the emergence of the subject’. Through his cross-cultural tracing of the historical development of the notion of self in Western cultures, Hunter implicitly argues that Mauss provides a useful framework within which to consider Foucault’s notion of ‘techniques of the self’, in which ‘individuals came to conceive of themselves as objects of their own ethical attention’ (1993, p. 181), particularly through the linking of personhood to the conscience and consciousness of individuals.

Mauss’s key point is that there are separate domains of socially transmitted techniques of ‘the body’ and ‘the self’. These techniques are then assembled together in different social formations. However, Mauss did not extend his work on this topic to detailed elaborations on specific formations or alliances between various mind and body techniques (but my argument here is that this is a useful avenue of research contemporary cultural studies). Nevertheless, Mauss’ work crucially reminds us that while there are historically-specific alliances between mind and body techniques, it is not the case that all such alliances (including Certeau’s model of walking) can be held to ‘be governed by a single goal or function: the formation of the subject’ (Hunter 1993, p. 182). As Hunter argues, this presumption – that subject formation is the ultimate endpoint of techniques of the body – has been dominant in modern western cultures. One of the by-products of this reasoning has been a rigid differentiation of bodily and mental attributes in which the former are universally characterized as ‘unconscious, in the sense of lying beyond the reach of conscious knowledge, resisting its rationality through desire and the drives, and so on’ (1993, p. 183). So while dialectical body theory is useful in directing us towards the ways in which ‘our capacities and conducts are not governed by the canons of rational knowledge’, it is, as Hunter suggests, less helpful in attributing the ‘absence of such governance with the unconscious or the bodily drives’ (1993, p. 183). In contrast, Mauss’s work suggests that habitual bodily attributes like walking are not necessarily ‘unconscious’ bodily performances that must carry all the weight of that particular adjective.
Instead, as Hunter notes, ‘they fall neither within nor beyond the reach of knowledge, because they belong to another department of existence’, one identified as that of ‘training’, a social process whose distinguishing trait is ‘not scientific circumspection but habitual virtue’ (1993, p. 183). And as Mauss argues, this habitual virtuosity is assembled through different forms of social authority and exhibits differences in terms of ‘societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges’ (Mauss 1973, p. 73).11

Mauss’s understanding of walking as a habitual practice, organized and transmitted through different forms of social authority, thereby enables a useful corrective to Certeau’s more restricted dialectical understanding of the relation between the subject and the body. In Mauss’s formulation, the body is a territory upon which a certain education and training might be inscribed; however, this education is somewhat different to the training of the subject famously analysed by Foucault (despite the frequent articulation of these two kinds of training in Western cultures). Thus, an analysis of practices of walking, I would suggest, must begin with a recognition that there is no ‘privileged interface between the body and subjectivity or the body and society’ (Hunter 1993, p. 183); rather, there are only specific cultural assemblages. Accordingly, we need to examine the ways in which different techniques of walking (dispositions of the body) are articulated with formations of subjectivity within particular urban contexts.

Walking as a practice of affective investment

As suggested above, Mauss’s work enables us to think about practices of walking outside the logic of the knowing subject and the unconscious body; that is, he allows the corporeal dimension of walking to re-emerge in a complex manner through his account of ‘techniques of the body’. In particular, Mauss directs us towards the socialized nature of the physical, machinic aspects of walking that are the product of social education: ‘breathing, rhythm of the walk, swinging the fists, progression with the trunk in advance of the body or by advancing either side of the body alternately . . . Feet in or out. Extension of the leg’ (p. 82). Yet, as subjects we are often aware that the social practice of these techniques of walking are always accompanied by levels of ‘intensity’ (Massumi 1995), or lack thereof, depending on their context. In other words, practices of walking also have a certain texture, attitude, or tone, that is not discussed in Mauss’s account. This significant property of ‘intensity’, which describes an everyday awareness or feeling of a connection between the strolling body and the world, is best described through the theoretical notion of affect that I explore in the following section.

Firstly, however, I want to briefly return to Certeau. Some elements of this affective dimension of walking are alluded to in his account, particularly in
his characterization of walking as a lucid practice, though as I will demonstrate they are still problematically framed within a psychoanalytic, ‘symbolic’ or meaning-oriented paradigm. In particular, Certeau’s structural-linguistic model characterizes the city as a text while the everyday (and the body of the walker) is implicitly associated with the pre-symbolic. Consider, for instance, Certeau’s characterization of the dynamic relationship between the practices of individual walkers and the ‘official’ urban landscape and discourse with which they interact. He argues that the bodies of walkers ‘follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read’ (1984, p. 93). Walking in this sense is a process of multiple bodily inscriptions of ‘the city’ where ‘the networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alteriations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other’ (1984, p. 93).

Here Certeau simultaneously draws upon and differentiates his approach from the one outlined in Roland Barthes’ seminal lecture on ‘Semiology and the Urban’, given in Naples in 1967. Barthes (1986) tentatively suggested in this lecture that

the best model for the semantic study of the city will be provided, I believe, at least in the beginning, by the phrase of discourse. And here we rediscover Victor Hugo’s old intuition: the city is writing. He who moves about the city, e.g., the user of the city (what we all are), is a kind of reader who, following his obligations and his movements, appropriates fragments of the utterance in order to actualize them in secret.

(1986, p. 95)

The similarities between Barthes and Certeau here are apparent in the shared notion that the ‘user’ writes the ‘text’ of the city. Yet, Certeau also implicitly critiques the kind of structuralist approach suggested by Barthes in so far as he maintains that the *totality* of these fragments or utterances actualized by city users remains ‘indefinitely other’ to the structuralist critic, for there is ‘an unlimited diversity’ (1986, p. 99) to these enunciatory operations. According to Certeau, these fragments belong to another domain of knowledge, that of ‘the everyday’, a realm that evades incorporation within the official, ‘scientific’ paradigm that Barthes’ essay (1986: 97) seeks to clarify. Certeau thus posits a more localized and modest approach that focuses on describing some of the enunciative figures deployed by walkers (see Certeau 1984, pp. 100–2).

The question is, however, does Certeau’s reliance on linguistic metaphors to describe those embodied actions of the walker ironically result in a decorporalization of the relation between walker and city? Almost, but not completely, as can be seen in his identification of the three characteristics of the rhetoric of walking, which distinguish it from the urban spatial system.
within which it takes place. Those characteristics are ‘the present, the discrete, the “phatic”’ (1984, p. 98). The present and the discrete unambiguously describe semiotic/enunciative operations in the form of the choices made by the walker, his or her rhetorical flourishes, which effectively ‘privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements’ (1984, p. 98) in order to make them mean something or, alternatively, mean ‘nothing’ by condemning ‘certain places to inertia or disappearance’ (1984, p. 99). At the same time as walking performs these semantic operations, however, Certeau argues that it also creates a ‘mobile organicity in the environment, a sequence of phatic topoi’ (1984, p. 99). In other words, the rhetoric of walking frequently involves departures from, or interruptions to, fixed paths and proper places: these departures and interruptions are moments when walking ‘gambols, goes on all fours, dances’ (1984, p. 99) ensuring a continuity of communication in the spatial story that connects a ‘here’ and ‘there’, but not the production of ‘meaning’ in the strictest sense.

The other point at which Certeau suggestively edges towards a non-semiotic dimension of walking is in his discussion of the relation of memory to spatial practice. Initially, that discussion of memory is framed within narratological and semiotic terms; that is, walking is a signifying practice that enables narrative entries and exits, opportunities ‘for going away and coming back’ (1984, p. 106), an opening up of space ‘to something different’ (1984, p. 107), a personal story. The memories of walkers thus haunt the official order and make it habitable: ‘“That’s where old lady Dupuis used to live”’ (1984, p. 108). However, in his concluding paragraph to this particular discussion the body makes a surprising reappearance when Certeau further comments that

Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. ‘I feel good here’: the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice.

(1984, p. 108)

In this passage, then, Certeau moves toward a recognition of the importance of bodily experiences of ‘pain or pleasure’ as being fundamental to walking. However, his concluding comparison of this process to its linguistic recording through the phrase ‘I feel good here’ is an unnecessary gloss — what seems important here is that Certeau recognizes that the ‘embodied’ experiences produced through practices of walking cannot necessarily be read through a traditional semiotic framework.
The notion of ‘feeling good’ in a place or through a particular practice of walking can be, in fact, more robustly discussed through the notion of affect. Affect allows a displacement of some of the problematic binary oppositions—mind/body, conscious/unconscious, symbolic/pre-symbolic—that otherwise organize Certeau’s work. Brian Massumi (1995), in particular, has offered an engaging account of the concept and operations of affect that I will briefly draw upon here. The realm or presence of affect, according to Massumi, can be discerned in the gap between content and effect that marks cultural practices (while Massumi refers to the example of image reception in his article, I would argue that his argument is equally applicable to other social practices like walking) (1995, p. 84). While part of the function of images, for example, is to carry a certain ‘content’ in terms of their indexing to conventional meanings in a socio-linguistic structure (which Massumi calls their quality), they are also marked by the strength or duration of that effect (what Massumi refers to as their intensity or ‘affect’). For Massumi, this property of intensity is not semiotically or semantically ordered. Intensity ‘is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things’ (1995, p. 85). Furthermore, he convincingly argues that there is no fixed ‘correspondence or conformity between quality and intensity’ (1995, p. 85). Instead, the relationship between quality and affect might be more usefully described in terms of ‘resonation or interference, amplification or dampening’ (1995, p. 86). As Massumi notes, there is much to gain from ‘integrating the dimension of intensity into cultural theory’ (1995, p. 87).

Consider, for example, the collective act of the crowd walking through city streets to or from a sports match at a local stadium. This type of walking mobilizes particular semiotic regimes that are articulated to different ideological meanings; for example, the display of certain sporting paraphernalia (scarves, hats and jumpers in club colours on walkers’ bodies) enables the production of various ‘community’ identities that are organized around particular mythologies. However, the cultural force carried by those signifiers as they are literally paraded in the streets is not simply an effect of its visual display and attendant semiotic meanings. Certainly, on the one hand, these walkers are enacting a semiotic transformation (in Certeau’s sense) of ‘place’ into a particular space. Yet, there is something more happening here. For as David Crouch (1998) observes, one of the primary effects produced through this particular walking practice may in fact be to ‘drown out’ the usual semiotic messages produced in relation to buildings passed and the layout of the streets traversed:

It is the presence and movement of bodies that assists the knowledge of a shared purpose and participation; and of a meaning that transforms the materiality of space itself... In their presence and in their movement, the
bodies of self and of others, identified with similar purpose, feeling and direction, are dissolved into an intention and an identity that overwhelms any other image the street may hold; shops, houses, traffic, as these become culturally deafened by the ritual of occupation.

(1998, p. 167)

Within this context, comments Crouch, the body becomes a key barometer for assessing ‘the multidimensionality of events, their intensity, uncertainty’ (1998, p. 168). In this particular ritual of occupation, the affective dimension of collective walking disproportionately amplifies and focuses what is a common city practice, crowds walking through streets to particular destinations.

It is worth noting here that while there is certainly often a series of emotions signified through the practice of walking to/from the stadium (anticipation, elation, disappointment – all depending on whether the walking takes place before or after the match, who has lost or won), these are secondary to affect. As Massumi argues, emotion – in contrast to affect – ‘is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, ... [i]t is intensity owned and recognized’ (1995, p. 88). Yet, to talk of affect in this way is not to suggest that it belongs to some ‘pre-reflexive, romantically raw domain of primitive experiential richness’ (Massumi 1995, p. 90). For Massumi, affect is not presocial but asocial because affect involves the brain and body conserving ‘the trace of past actions including a trace of their contexts ... but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, directive spirit and dumb matter’ (1995, p. 91). That is, affect is asocial because it is the storing and repetition of these past actions and contexts, their autonomic reactivation but not their completion. Or, even more precisely, as Greg Seigworth (1999) argues, affect is a useful term for designating a habitual ‘ongoing accumulation of everyday time and space’ that may at some point reach a certain ‘density’ or ‘is struck by a vibrancy that causes the collection to behave like an unsettled atmosphere: moving, now, toward a moment of condensation’ (1999, p. 6). In my example of walking to the sports stadium, that intensity and accumulation opens up into both past, the ‘memory’ of past experiences of a similarly charged moment, and future, a heightened anticipation of multiple possible emotional outcomes.

How then can this slippery notion of affect be usefully deployed when analysing a social practice such as walking? Here, Grossberg’s work is once again helpful, as he has produced perhaps one of the most sustained investigations into the role of affect in relation to popular practices. In particular, Grossberg has argued that the sensibilities of popular formations operate primarily on the plane of affect. In this respect, he observes that it ‘is possible that cultural practices may, in some circumstances, not operate
through the production of meaning... Sometimes the production of meaning may be little more than a distraction’ (1992, p. 52). Popular practices, in other words, are often also, as he puts it, practices of affective investment. Some popular practices (like music or, as I am arguing, certain kinds of walking in the city) operate primarily as sites for the production of a certain intensity that can potentially have important ideological effects. Thus, despite the seemingly clichéd nature of the urban protest march, the simple act of a group of people walking together in a public city street can still help produce startling ideological effects (consider, for example, the disproportionate ideological weight carried by the rituals of the ‘marching season’ in Northern Ireland). This is where the notion of articulation becomes vital. More generally, then, as Grossberg observes, the ‘dominance of the affective dimension does not mean that such popular formations do not also involve relations of ideology and pleasure, materiality and economics. Daily life always involves the inseparable articulation of these domains; it can only be understood as the complex relations among these’ (1992, p. 83).

Conclusion: mind-body-city

The need to recognize daily life as an inseparable articulation of multiple domains (though in a quite different way to Grossberg) has also been highlighted by Simon During (1993) who comments that,

Most relevantly, within a discipline [cultural studies] that has globalized itself through affirming otherness, it is important to remember the obvious point that everyday life is not everywhere the same, despite those modernizing effects of uniformity that Lefebvre was obsessed by. Think about walking in the city: doesn’t it make a difference if one walks in Paris, down-town Detroit, Melbourne, Mexico City, or Hong Kong just for starters? And, in each of these places, does a woman have the same experience as a man, a gay as a straight, a young person as an old one? The everyday, too, is produced and experienced at the intersection of many fields by embodied individuals.

(1993, p. 25)

During’s comments here are useful because they foreground the importance of the role of ‘difference’ in terms of particular bodies-subjects and specific urban locations in discussing everyday practices like walking. However, there is still a somewhat problematic implicit notion here of cities existing prior to the embodied subjects who encounter them, of the urban as an already-formed territory, a fixed context that offers different experiences for its multiple inhabitants.
Similarly, Certeau’s account of walking places all of its emphases on the actions, choices and ‘turns’ of the embodied walker who seems to act (for the most part) on a quite static urban territory. Yet, is not the relationship between body-subject and city more of a two-way process? In ‘Bodies-Cities’, Elizabeth Grosz (1992) persuasively argues for a ‘two-way linkage which could be defined as an interface’ between body and city. This notion of the interface helps her describe a ‘fundamentally disunified series of systems and interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces, brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporary alignments’ (1992, p. 248). We witness here a ‘complex feedback relation’ between body and city that can not be assumed to form some unified whole:

The body and its environment, rather, produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, ‘citified’, urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body.

(1992, p. 242)

To accept such a framework is to once again move away more generally from a dialectic model where one term (body or city) is privileged over another and towards a notion of contingent and contextual assemblages. Grosz’s ‘interface’ thus offers a way of thinking about mind/body/city relations that is not ‘symptomatic’ or limited to a psychoanalytic framework (in the same way as Certeau). Furthermore, Grosz directs us here towards the idea that ‘there is no natural or ideal environment for the body, no ‘perfect’ city judged in terms of the body’s health and well-being. If bodies are not culturally pre-given, built environments cannot alienate the very bodies they produce’ (1992, p. 249). This is not to say, as Grosz also observes, that the rapid transformation of an environment might result in bodies inscribed in a particular cultural milieu experiencing a sense of ‘dislocation’ within a changed context. This was the experience Walter Benjamin charted in his history of the flâneur (the title of Benjamin’s study, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1997), captures this temporal disjuncture between individual and city). In the contemporary city — and as Grosz notes in her article — one of the most significant reformulations of the urban environments and corresponding cultural changes in the body are taking place around the ‘replacement of geographical space with the screen interface’ (1997, p. 251) of electronic communications technologies (see my article on a new casino-entertainment site for an analysis of a specific site (Morris 1999)).

This reorganization of contemporary urban space does not, however, simply erase and supplant older forms of mobility and ways of being in the
city. Instead, as writers like Margaret Morse (1990) have argued, it dis-places and refigures them in sometimes surprising ways. Thus even the most automobile-oriented and/or technologically mediated contemporary urban environments still exist as sites of meaning and desire articulated through walking practices. As Rebecca Solnit observes in her concluding chapter to *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2000), the gritty durability of walking as an urban practice is tellingly witnessed in the pedestrian renaissance currently taking place in the home of automobile-oriented, theme park urbanism, the Las Vegas Strip. As Solnit argues, the dogged crowds of tourists insistently braving the hot tarmac and touring the delirious pedestrian spectacles offered on the strip (pirate shows, exploding volcanoes, etc) are not simply helplessly trapped in some cage of simulation and an ersatz, collapsing public sphere. Instead, her observations suggest that despite the efforts of various kinds of urban and casino designers to ensure visitors’ self-containment within the air-conditioned, revenue-producing interiors, ‘people will seek out the experience of wandering about in the open air to examine the architecture, the spectacles, and the stuff for sale, will still hanker after surprises and strangers’ (2000, p. 287). They still hanker, perhaps, for urban experiences marked by shifts into different affective registers. However, Solnit’s observation does not mean that we necessarily have to reinscribe the ‘designers’ versus ‘users’ binary frequently reproduced in mobilizations of Certeau’s ‘Walking in the City’. As she notes in a moment of reflection, these ‘tourists’ are only temporarily inhabiting that identity formation in this particular time and place. Who is to say, she muses, that the throngs of local and international tourists walking the strip might not have also ‘walked’ in pilgrimages or radical protest marches? Solnit’s moment of recognition is one that all cultural studies theorists can learn from. Urban subjects and their practices (both everyday and extraordinary) are heterogeneous assemblages and the challenge for those interested in understanding contemporary city environments involves recognizing the complex configurations of what seem on the surface, at least, to be the most transparent of everyday cultural practices.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers who supplied invaluable suggestions regarding for this article.

**Notes**

1 This title is borrowed and adapted from Raymond Carver’s (1989) short story, ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’. The story concerns the difficulties inherent in trying to define and describe something
as commonsense and everyday as ‘love’ and the multiform (and often unpredictable) ways in which love’s affectual dimension is articulated.

2 Those exceptions include Meaghan Morris (1998) and Margaret Morse (1990), who both provide inspiring readings of Certeau that are particularly attuned to the problematic applicability of Certeau’s theoretical framework to walking practices occurring in radically different everyday urban environments.

3 This study was first breathed into life in my unpublished PhD thesis, ‘Journeys in Extraordinary Everyday Culture: Walking in the City’ (Morris 2001).

4 Not exclusively in cultural studies of course. We should note, for instance, the ‘command metaphor’ status that this term has recently assumed in related fields of inquiry, such as cultural geography. See, for instance, the recent collection Geographies of Resistance (Keith & Pile 1997).

5 It should be noted here that Certeau did not of course introduce the term ‘resistance’ to cultural studies more generally. Resistance was in fact a central conceptual category in the early development of Birmingham-style cultural studies. See, in particular, the collection edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1976).

6 Also see Ben Highmore’s (2002, p. 153) recent commentary on Certeau that reminds us that ‘resistance is clearly not [simply] synonymous with being “oppositional” or “progressive”’ and can certainly be understood to have a conservative dimension. An analysis of this largely conservative sense of resistance can be found in Jane M. Jacobs (1997) where she analyses the controversies that emerged around the construction of a city walking trail memorializing colonial and indigenous history.

7 Freud (1961, pp. 8–11) used the story of a game played by his young grandson, in which the 18-month-old threw a reel, figured by Freud as a substitute for the maternal body, away from himself crying ‘fort!’ (gone) and then reeling it back crying ‘da’ (here/back) to describe the crucial process by which the child differentiates itself from the mother’s body. Also see Jacques Lacan’s (1977, pp. 1–7) reinterpretation of the same paradigmatic, psychoanalytic moment.

8 As Hunter (1993, p. 176) goes on to note, he is not deliberately invoking the work of Freud here; but rather describing a tradition in which Freud’s work is one exemplary instance.

9 As Hunter (1993, p. 183) notes, ‘the identification of desire with the body and the unconscious – that the dialectical theorists take for granted – is for Foucault the product of a historically specific technique of moral problematization. Psychoanalysis is not so much a theory of this exercise in self-problematicization as a version of it’.
10 Cf. Ross (1995, p. 5). In her introduction to Fast Cars, Clean Bodies, Ross notes that Jacque Tati’s post-war films ‘make palpable a daily life that increasingly appeared to unfold in a space where objects tended to dictate to people their gestures and movements — gestures that had not yet congealed into any degree of rote familiarity, and that for the most part had to be learned from watching American films’.

11 Mauss uses the notion of the ‘habitus’ to encapsulate this sense of socially transmitted techniques and dispositions. Certeau also makes reference to the notion of *habitus*, but principally in relation to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990a, 1990b) somewhat different deployment of it. As Certeau argues, ‘the habitus’ is the missing link that allows Bourdieu to explain the gap between structures and practices or ‘dispositions’. However, Certeau disputes Bourdieu’s overall characterization of the process due to the privileged influence he accords to structures (over agents) in determining the social mobility of subjects (see Certeau 1984, pp. 56–60). What is important here, I would suggest, is not so much the question of the accuracy of Certeau’s critique but, instead, the consequences of his choosing to engage with Bourdieu as it shapes his work in such a way as to remain limited by what Hunter (1993, p. 175) describes as ‘the exemplary moral structures of humanist sociology — between structure and agency, repression and resistance, rationality and being ... played out “at the interface where society meets human bodies”’. However, as my analysis demonstrates, Mauss’s notion of assemblages suggests a means by which some of the limitations of a ‘structures’ versus ‘agent’-style analysis might be avoided in a deployment of Certeau’s work.

12 Cf. Greg Seigworth (1999, p. 4) comments that ‘affect constitutes a belonging to the outside, a becoming with the world’.

13 See, for example, Massumi’s (1995, pp. 101–2) discussion of Ronald Reagan’s ability to produce ideological effects through non-ideological (affective) means.

References


