Walking Pictures

Investigating through Film Practice the Structural, Sequential and Durational Character of the Urban Walk

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Abstract

The three films constituting this practice-based thesis document and respond to a particular kind of urban walk. Constructed both visually and narratively around three long walks that were themselves structured by recurrent features within a distinct urban context, the films deploy a range of aesthetic strategies to investigate and approximate the ways in which walking can be understood in structural, sequential and durational terms. Taken together, the three films adopt and combine techniques commonly associated with experimental film and the cinematic avant-garde – the steady-stare camera, the uninterrupted long take, stillness and repetition, a general eschewal of contextual information, and an emphasis upon the incidental. In combination, these techniques call attention to themselves and solicit a mode of spectatorship that is itself attentive and reflexive, a mode in which the incidental emerges as a potential frontline for everyday struggle.

As such, this thesis asserts and activates a spatial politics in which looking and listening become acts of decoding. Articulating the tensions between structure, repetition and rhythm, between stasis, slowness and simultaneity, and between disruption, perception and play, the project intensifies the underexplored connections between walking and film. It contributes a deeper understanding of the ways in which both can be considered as distinct practices that take meaning from one another in terms not only of form but also of the armature they provide for joined-up and dialectical thinking.

In addition, the thesis contributes to the field of psychogeography, positioning and validating the destination-oriented walk as a legitimate subgenre of the dérive – a tradition more commonly understood as an aimless city meander. Exploring the synchronous relationship between fixity and chance, between a predetermined route and the countless contingencies at play along it, my films are at once spatiotemporally bound, definable as documentary snapshots of a specific urban terrain, and highly formal works that capture and convey city spaces in all their totality and generality. Within this context, I contribute an image of the walk as simultaneously unique and repeatable: an effective conduit for recording and communicating on-the-day energies, intensities, ambience – and a means through which an active engagement with urban space in all its multiplicities may take hold.

Keywords: city, experimental film, practice, psychogeography, urban, walking

Dedication

To my parents, who are always behind me, and to my partner, who is always ahead.

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I wish to thank Dr Ian McDonald for trusting me to get this done, and Professor Venda Pollock for making sure that I did. Their distinct and combined specialisms, conversations and strategies of support have made this thesis possible.

Research can be an isolating task, and the timeline of this project has been divided into two parts: the first in which I lived within walking distance of campus and the second in which I lived in a different country. As the project has drawn to a close, I have had cause to recall its earlier and less isolated days, in which I took energy from the small cohort of researchers who were, like me, part of the Northern Bridge Consortium, a Doctoral Training Partnership funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I thank these friends, now far-flung, for their sense of community and solidarity, which often prevented this researcher's own work from feeling untethered.

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The Films Constituting this Thesis

This commentary was written in support of three films submitted additionally and separately to the present text. In the event the digital copies of these films are misplaced, they can be viewed below:

Lea River Bridges (34’40)
https://vimeo.com/michaelpattison/leariverbridges

Lubiana Laibach (62’50)
https://vimeo.com/michaelpattison/lubianalaibach

9 x 45 (14’36)
https://vimeo.com/michaelpattison/9x45

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Introduction. Approaching on Foot: Walking with, and in, Images

> No time for the savouring of reflections in shop windows, admiration for the Art Nouveau ironwork, attractive matchboxes rescued from the gutter. This was walking with a thesis. With a prey.
>
> — Iain Sinclair (1997: 75)

It began in London, on the Lea: an 18-mile trudge down one river towards another – the Thames. I first walked this route, along the Lee Navigation towpath – cutting through East London from Waltham Abbey – on 17 August 2015. I had at that point begun to take photographs. Documenting the various walks that I was completing across London and other cities, I hoped and planned to recover some of their meanings, later, in literary form. At some stage, however, I was struck not only by the number of bridges that traverse the Lea, but also by their particularly photographic qualities. While the towpath runs parallel to the river, the bridges cross both; with no choice but to pass under these viaducts, I became aware of the similarity of my compositions from one photograph to the next. Positioned beneath the bridges, looking along their underbellies with the river flowing perpendicularly below them, I grew increasingly conscious that I was compiling an index of compositions taken from more or less the same angle. It soon became a game: just how identical could these compositions get?

Viewed as such, the river and the bridges interconnected in an immediately imagistic form: the bridge extending through the y-axis, the river bisecting the composition across its x-axis, and their arrangement captured in such a way as to evoke their spatial depth – the z-axis. This would often, through the reflection of the bridge in the water, divide my image into quarters: four smaller frames emphasising the whole photograph as a thing that had been constructed *as an image*. Put another way, it resisted – or seemed to be resisting – a literary form. Later, when I was able to juxtapose my photographs in sequence, the duplicate framing choice seemed also to draw attention to the remarkable variations between one surrounding landscape and the next. The Lea marks a route through London defined by such variation, shifting between industrial, post-industrial, marsh, residential, urban and semi-rural land. Indeed, the bridges themselves serve a range of functions, encompassing public footpaths, multiple-lane carriageways, railway tracks, private walkways between sprawling industrial sites that flank both sides of the river, and pipes

connecting London with the gasworks, reservoirs and electricity stations located on its peripheries.

This was in other words a liminal terrain, what Marion Shoard (2000) coined the edgelands. An "apparently unplanned, certainly uncelebrated and largely incomprehensible territory where town and country meet" (75), the edgelands are characterised by their rawness and the ambiguous role they play within the contemporary organisation of consumption and production – the complex, globalised chains of supply and demand (76-8). If any sense of place persists in the edgelands, it is due both to this ambiguous function and the concurrent sense that they are places of nothing but function. They have purpose, that is, yet are mysterious in their purpose: the architecture here tends to be grey, windowless, uncompromising. This is the realm of the depot, the warehouse, the training centre. As Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2011) write, such architectures represent "a function we can't live without, but don't want to live with … We want them close enough to us, but far enough to be ignored" (193). Combined, such ambiguity and multiplicity of function, as well as the normalisation of its concomitant buildings and structures, have fundamentally affected the urban experience. In the context of urban sprawl, walking becomes a means of what the philosopher Frédéric Gros (2014) articulates as "setting oneself apart: at the edge of those who work, at the edges of high-speed roads, at the edge of the producers of profit and poverty, exploiters, labourers, and at the edge of those serious people who always have something better to do than receive a pale gentleness of a winter sun or the freshness of a spring breeze" (94). Even if such sentiments risk romanticising what remains for too many an unpleasant reality, Gros echoes here an image sketched by Henri Lefebvre (2004), of a city's "ordinary practitioners", those found "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" and whose intersecting movements as pedestrians constitute the urban everyday (93).

Within this urban everyday, a context in which the arrangement, organisation, regulation and management of human life are at their most dense and intensified, and in which production, consumption, mediation, circulation and alienation are at their most infrastructurally complex (Gotham 2005), questions of mobility become questions of inclusion and multiplicity. Walking is thus simultaneously a fundamental and marginal practice within the city, at once a liberating meander (Solnit 2014: 7) and potential marker of vulnerability (Donaldson 2017; Hubbard and Wilkinson 2019) or precarity (Tsing 2015). The porousness of these traits takes meaning from the context-dependent categorisation of bodies and identities, the capital one can leverage and/or be exposed by, within the capitalist marketplace and within a landscape of abandonment, dereliction,

ruins, of bollards, fences, barbed wire, and of security gates, surveillance cameras, identification lanyards. Iain Sinclair (2003), tramping up the River Lea, refers to its Berlin effect: "checkpoints, border guards, security cameras" (49). Like Sinclair – to whom we will shortly return – I am an able-bodied white man whose mobility and social capital are nevertheless challenged by (because they potentially pose or represent a threat to) the more forbidding features of the terrain. Walking down the Lea, I take note of apparently unmanned security kiosks, windows tinted; tube lights, twitching and flickering, glimpsed through cracks in an empty building's small air-vent; a giant bunker-like structure, concrete-grey in colour, emits the loud hum of a generator. As Farley and Symmons Roberts (2011) note: "To walk in edgelands ruins is to feel absence and presence at the same time. Absence comes in the form of office chairs without office clerks to sit on them, ashtrays with cigarette butts stubbed out twenty years ago, newspapers breaking stories we have digested and forgotten" (154).

Alert to change, to the sudden escalation of threat within the dulling repetitions of the mise-en-scène, one adopts a hypersensitivity to one's surroundings, and subsequently proceeds fully aware of certain vulnerabilities – which are, in their own way, for someone at least of my disposition and persuasion, nevertheless empowering in their playfulness. Such notions of play are key to creativity and imagination (Brown 2009; Pink 2009; Amabile 2009), and in the more specific context of urban engagement to what Robert White (1959) calls "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (297). If play underlines feelings of competence and self-confidence (Basch 1988), it is also a dialectical mode fraught with contradictions between control and discovery, power and fantasy, chance and prediction (see Winnicott 1971). Embodying such tensions, play is written into the urban fabric: Phil Smith (2014) points to a method of "schizo-cartographic mapping" (224), derived from Tina Richardson's means of identifying "the ideological contradictions that appear in urban space, while simultaneously enabling creative expression for those who inhabit it" (cited in ibid). Such contradictions inform the empowering vulnerability that the urban walker inhabits. They are the absence of presence and the presence of absence already alluded to; but Smith also highlights the "spaces that exploitation leaves behind, sprung open as a result of business failure or bad planning" (224). Undertaking a dérive in Plymouth, he encounters "bricked-up windows, gates barricaded or double-gated; barbed wire used liberally on garden walls and razor wire around industrial units" (ibid). These are expressions of a conflicting and conflicted ideology: the privatisation of public space, the emptying-out of city centres, the formulation of an uninhabitable architecture, or new

landscapes “designed to be overlooked” (225). As such, the edgelands are no longer a marker of a neither-urban-nor-rural liminality, as Shoard first posited: they are themselves a measure of ongoing change in urban planning and alterations to the built city and the frontlines on and through which its conditions for consumption, employment and labour are contested (Parr 2007).

Walking a terrain such as the Lea, I am fascinated by the tension between sameness and variation: the fluctuations that are gradual and barely perceivable rather than sudden and appreciable. What are otherwise disparate pockets on a map bleed into one another. Boroughs, clearly marked on paper, are not necessarily announced to the pedestrian. Abandoning the map, allowing the contingencies of the pavement to do their work, one must read the landscape through other means: street signs, bus numbers, those hoardings that advertise which small businesses might be found within some anonymous industrial estate. As one graffito put it as I walked down the Lea: “DEFINATLY NOT IN HACKNEY NOW”. How else was I to know? As the miles disappear underfoot, however, changes in the landscape do take place: less in the form of an abrupt cut than a slow dissolve. One must reconstitute the change in ambience retroactively – referring to pictures taken several miles back, perhaps, or by making a conscious effort to attune oneself to the immediateness of present surroundings so as to emphasise what is now the vagueness of those places already transgressed. Place in this sense is defined by and becomes a repository of memory: a passing feature of an onward transit. “We are aware of how insistently we claim that edgelands are spaces in flux,” write Farley and Symmons Roberts (2011), “often changing their character swiftly and without warning. But their transience really can bewilder” (155). Investigating the limbo land between urban geographies, the two poets home in on the unnamed and the ignored, on the abandoned and the transient. They structure their findings as a compilation of – and ode to – individual features in the landscape. “[S]haped around the *things* to be found in this debatable region” (9; emphasis in original), their album is a lyrical gestalt consisting of otherwise banal minutiae: cars, paths, landfill, water, sewage, wire, pallets.

Inevitably, perhaps, they encounter bridges: “Nameless bridge, its cast concrete walls and pillars are dark with run-off stains and vertical deltas of algae. It carries a minor road across six lanes of motorway, and nobody is ever meant to really look at any of this” (125). Farley and Symmons Roberts, in their search for a poesis of place, look and look again. They spend time in spaces that are unknown, taken for granted, forgotten. And they find, there, beauty in the bland:

> This kind of bridge doesn’t suggest any great triumph of engineering. Here, the man-made isn’t traversing a great estuary or deep valley, with all the confidence, swagger and

> aplomb of an earlier age: it is doing its job, a tone poem to absolute function and utility, dead loads and live loads, longitudinal forces and wind. It is unimpressive but lapidary. The edgelands are full of such bridges just like it, carrying smaller roads or raising the motorway itself across back lanes, canals and byways. (ibid)

For me, path-pounding a particular stretch of London, the tension between repetition and difference took meaning from the structural and structuring aspects of the walk, and from the way in which each new bridge provided an opportunity to take stock of the change in ambience. The primary question that began to subsequently take hold was less about how walking might be approximated in artistic terms than what type of walk I was undertaking (and why), and what type of artform was organically emerging (and why). If I intuited the material to be the city in both its particulars and its totality, the methods were partial, embodied, subjective, discriminating, incomplete: how to articulate the multiplicity of these environments, how to provide a framework for observing or analysing their modalities and configurations, their differences and commonalities, their peculiarities and specificities, while at the same time communicating the singular authorship responsible for such distillations and stylisations?

Two further points of interest quickly emerged. While it was obvious to me that this 18-mile walk's iterative, bridge-by-bridge structure provided a consideration of a particular stretch through London in terms of its sequentiality, its durational character seemed to be underserved by a merely photographic account. As stimulated as I was by the idea of viewing these bridges as a sequence of stills, I was equally drawn to the various contingencies in place and the narratives that began to unfold at each individual site. Water moves: the river flows. Footfalls fluctuate according to variables including weather, temperature, light, hour and day of the week – each of which, in turn, lends its own contribution to the rhythms, textures and ambiences of the environment. Such possibilities constitute what Volker Patenburg (2007) calls "contingency as a guaranteed proof of reality" (188), and they have as much to do with the sounds one hears as the things one sees. Whereas the image in straightforward terms might be of a bridge leading to a field on the opposite side of the river, the sounds accompanying it suggest and allow for a more complicated reading of the land: birdsong and other wildlife, a nearby generator, a busy motorway, distant police sirens, a strong wind. All of these, combined, inform a sense of place. Capturing both the immediacy and concurrency of such multiplicity as well as the structural, sequential and durational nature of the walk itself became the dual aim. I was beginning to think, I realised, in moving images.

I. The Strategies: Structure, Sequence, Duration

The first question surrounds techniques and methods. A particular kind of cinematographic image can both draw upon and reassert the increasingly prevalent notion that still photography has its own durational qualities. Still images, in the digital age of slideshows, can no longer be thought of in strictly atemporal terms. Matilde Nardelli (2012) writes about the "cinematization" of still photography, arguing that photographs are increasingly consumed from screens rather than as printed artefacts: from computers, tablets and other portable devices, and from the cinema or gallery screen. "The photograph," she avows, "is more and more often experienced as an image that, not unlike cinema, in some measure, *ends* – it goes off or passes in a way that a printed photograph does not" (159; emphasis in original). In the cinema, the durational is reified through an imposed stillness (Manovich 2001: 107): the viewer[1] sits, in lighting conditions designed to minimise distraction from and maximise attention upon the cinema screen itself, for a specified length of time. Outside of the mainstream – and, indeed, sometimes in active opposition to it – filmmakers have deployed stillness *within* the film frame, to the point where their moving image is defined as much by its temporal qualities as its similarity to the still photograph. Put another way, the film or video camera does not need to move in order to capture or document movement. Nardelli quotes Gilles Deleuze: "At the point where the cinematographic image most directly confronts the photo, it also becomes most radically distinct from it" (169).

Photography, still and otherwise, bears an indexical relationship to and evocation of the world. In observing an environment captured through such means, we commonly encounter as texturally and textually close an approximation of that environment as can be captured: an *indexical* record. Considered in such terms, the photographic image is both of this world and an intervention upon it: the former due to its dependence on light and trace, the ways in which its form and content are delimited and partially governed by pre-existing elements and components, and the latter due to the myriad choices – stylistic, formal, technical – through which the final image is conceived and developed. In this sense, my films articulate and challenge an understanding of content as a term relating to indexical and documentarian reality on the one hand, and to stylised, highly mediated images on the other. What the filmmaker has visually and sonically *been able to include* in this sequence of scenes, each of my films asserts, was made

[1] Throughout this text, I will reference 'the viewer' to mean primarily myself. If I remark that a film places much demand upon the viewer's attention, I mean it places much demand upon my own. I do not exist outside of the cultural conditions or historical dialogues to which I am here contributing, and hereby acknowledge that my assumptions and expectations as a film-watcher are as informed by the standardised modes of filmmaking as are my preferred lines of enquiry as a researcher and artist.

possible by a set of pre-existing circumstances – seasonal, meteorological, architectural, and so on. At the same time, however, the textural and textual outcomes, as well as the chronology in which the sequences are presented, themselves express a set of choices – some of which are the result of basic colour grading while others are the result of more complex optical processes. When I hitherto discuss the content of my films, then – or indeed that of structural films historically indebted to abstraction and non-lens-based image-making – the term is intended to encompass the indexical *and* the mediated, the captured *and* the conjured. A good example of this is *Lubiana Laibach*, the focus of my second chapter, in which a discussion of content implies everything the camera and its accompanying microphone captured on the one hand and the multitude of incidents, happenstances, sensory experiences, thematic threads and interpretative responses made possible by the formal presentation of those images on the other.

Positioned both against and in line with these conceptual understandings of documentarian content and photography, my moving-image practice is also predicated on ideas of stillness. The films constituting this thesis consist of tripod-fixed compositions that challenge conventional notions of narrative: in dramatic terms, by which I mean the scripted or planned construction of incident, not much happens. Furthermore, the often unrelentingly central perspective of these films' images – regardless of whatever other incidental action might occur within the frame – inscribes the viewing process with a reflexivity that is dependent equally upon a sense of duration and a sense of stillness. Or of stillness in duration: watching a film that actively challenges narrative convention draws one's attention to the viewing process itself, precisely because the tension between the fixed frames and the movement within them creates a contradictory sense of temporality. The viewer is made to feel time passing through the experience of watching stillness play out. If such notions of "being made to feel" are suggestive of illusion and perceptual play, however, they can be understood in contradistinction to claims of unplanned incident or non-scripted drama. A practice in which duration and stillness are experienced and understood in tandem is a highly dialectical one: its need to allow things to unfold of their own accord, and therefore its logical emphasis upon the contingent and the incidental, is as much an outcome of aesthetic considerations and formal constructions as anything else. This is a cinema of simultaneity.

As such, it is not enough to suggest that my films are both scripted and unscripted, or that they are best situated somewhere between the authored and unauthored. The either-or concept resulting from this suggestion is inadequate, implying as it does a practice in which, at any given

moment and with varying degrees of obviousness, some measurement either way is possible. Rather, through a complex consideration and deployment of formal techniques, the suite of moving-image works to which the present text is designed to lend context is the outcome of careful construction – even and especially when the labour, rationale and techniques behind that construction are not made clear by or within the films themselves. My films exploit assumptions of documentarian indexicality, suggesting themselves to be of this world even while they articulate a gaze that is partial, prejudiced, mediative, to evoke new configurations of an environment, new spatial orientations within an environment, and new imaginative modes of thinking about an environment. Consequently, when it is said that not much happens, here, what is meant is that everything happens: by framing an environment in a particular way, my films allow for its plenitudes to be experienced *as* plenitudes. As such, in my practice, the contingent itself is never not at play, never not of interest, never not happening: *all at once*. If my walking will in due course be articulated and revealed as a highly designed practice – in its reclamation for instance of the dérive less as a randomised, automated drift than as a conscious, destination-oriented stalk – my films make the intrinsic tension between documentary image-making and mediated image-making their chief line of enquiry. Here, the incidental is symptomatic of a particular kind of authorship or authorial vision. To frame this dialectic in clearer terms, while my foot- and screen-based practices often combine the unanticipated and the predetermined, the combination itself is a work of design, a result of conceptual thinking and creative decision-making. In crude terms, as we shall see, this tension is illustrated by instances where the unanticipated is *provoked* by my presence, whereby passers-by directly respond to the camera; but in other ways – again, as we shall see – this tension is present in the manipulation of certain imagery, and in the calibration of certain sound- and image-based effects, whereby the very ontological basis of documented reality – what is and what is not recorded, for instance, and what is and what is not made – is brought into question. In other words, a term such as "incidental" here comes to mean two things at once: an incident that is unfolding in causal relation to and as a direct result of the camera's presence – its positioning, its framing, its lingering – and that which is unfolding *incidentally*, as in by chance.

It is in this way that, while often positioned in opposition to narrative cinema, moving-image works that focus on and take much of their meaning from duration are nevertheless highly suggestive of narrative – not despite a lack of traditional storytelling elements, but because of it. James Benning has responded to this dichotomy repeatedly in his work. Across a career spanning

five decades, the American filmmaker has continually focused upon stillness as a function of duration, employing increasingly long takes, especially in work made this century, so as to interrogate the very act of film-watching. Promoting such viewing practices as a line of query that is equal in value to the content within each frame – primarily landscape, but also by implication land *usage*, and the history of land as a contestable site expressive of and resulting from particular modes and relations of production – Benning's work has become known for its extreme distillation of stillness and duration. The two are connected: stillness, or what in film-narrative terms we might refer to as the absence of dramatic or dramatized incident, is felt and experienced in and through time. Benning rationalises his trademark employment of the long take, for instance, in the following terms: "Even if there's nothing happening, say, you can't show nothing happening by looking at something for 5 seconds. It's more convincing (with regard to nothing happening) to see that the wind doesn't blow for 10 minutes than that it doesn't blow for 3 seconds" (quoted in Hebdige 2007: 139). In both drawing from and concentrating upon the contingent and incidental details of everyday life, Benning is part of a long avant-garde tradition seeking to continue and remobilise what Tom Gunning (2006) persuasively defines as the "cinema of attractions", that mode of early cinema in which the cameraperson and their recording device were looked at by subjects whose everyday contexts and interactions were themselves the filmmaker's primary point of interest (see also Strauven 2006). In such examples as the Lumières' tripod-locked view of workers leaving a factory in Lyon (1895), or their boat-mounted panorama of the Grand Canal in Venice (1896), the camera's own stasis and the fourth wall-severing gaze of human subjects solicits a speculative mode of spectatorship attentive to the relationship between in-frame and offscreen dynamics. If this tension underpins to varying degrees and in multiple ways all artmaking, it is the central tenet of my practice: mine is a mode, like Benning's, in which "the strictest planning throws the unplannable into relief" (Balsom 2021: 85).

Emerging as it has, then, in response to the distinctly urban character of certain environments (more on this in a moment), my own practice can be situated within and at the confluence of several avant-garde traditions: the cinema of structure, the cinema of stasis, and the cinema of attractions. Combining such traditions, I investigate and approximate the structural, sequential and durational character of the urban walk and advance a mode of filmmaking particularly suited to surveying, discovering and understanding urban experience. While an expansion upon the definitions and contentions of these terms will follow, as a starting point and

guiding principle some initial terms can be set. In taking the infrastructural and architectural specifics encountered on my walks as the structuring device of each resulting film, my practice encompasses what P. Adams Sitney (2002) refers to as a "cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified … the primal impression of the film" (348). Sitney identifies Andy Warhol as a key pioneer of the structural film, highlighting his use of duration and development of the long take. Warhol's focus upon duration, taken up later by Benning, conditions a mode of viewing quite distinct from conventional film-watching habits. Paired with a minimisation of onscreen content – at least, again, with regard to a general, codified set of audience assumptions and narrative expectations – durational cinema draws attention to its own characteristics and mechanisms. Sitney points here to Stephen Koch's analysis of Warhol's *Haircut* (1963), in which someone looks into the camera for such a long time that, under the absurd expectation of incident – one might say, today, content – they begin to laugh. Koch describes this as "the cinematic drama of the gaze, reaching its final and reflexive development… *Haircut* is about the hypnotic nature of the gaze itself, about the power of the artist over it" (quoted in Sitney 2002: 351). From this, Sitney concludes: "The great challenge of the structural film, then, became how to orchestrate duration; how to permit the wandering attention that triggered ontological awareness while watching Warhol films and at the same time guide that awareness to a goal" (351-2).

There are three things to consider here, none of which can or should be separated from the others. The first is the graphic component of my films, which pertains to the visual and compositional arrangement of the shots in each work. These shots are determined by – which is to say they take their overall shape and visual meaning from – recurrent infrastructural or architectural features. There is secondly the rhythmic component, which encompasses not just the internal relationships of onscreen planes of action but also the films' broader editorial approximation of walking as a rhythmic practice. Consequently, the third consideration here is the narrative component. "Inescapably," writes Michael Sorkin, "the walk takes on a narrative quality. Walking is a natural armature for thinking sequentially" (2013: 88). It is on such terms that my film practice takes on narrative qualities; emerging from walks that were conceived as single, physically achievable journeys, my films are likewise sequential in nature. The sequence of each film – its narrative shape, its repetitions and variations – is determined by the itinerary of the walk that informed it: bridges encountered in sequence, north to south along a river, for instance, or stone monuments encountered along a path encircling an entire city, or an installation

constituting nine sculptures sited across an urban terrain at fixed locations measured in relation to its centre.

It is perhaps no surprise that Sorkin's conception of walking as a sequential mode leads him to cinema: "Among the innovations of cinema was montage, the capacity to create meaning via the studied juxtaposition of forms, places, movements, and events… thereby mapping a rich repertoire of strategies for producing meaning via visual connections" (88). In a film such as *Lubiana Laibach*, which I give more focus to in the second chapter of this text, the studied juxtaposition of forms, places, movements and events is made visible and obvious by means of extended dissolves, the superimposition resulting from which simultaneously evokes a sense of spatiotemporal passage (distances walked) and an urban space defined by continuousness and coexistence. If such strategies upend both the punchy, stop-start progression of *Lea River Bridges* and the disruptive discontinuities of *9 x 45* (the focus of my third chapter), the extended character of *Lubiana Laibach*'s dissolves serves to heighten the sense of stillness concurrently suggested by the steady-stare nature of the camera. It is in this sense, consequently, that in attempting to condense and approximate a sense of change across distance – in documenting, that is, the various shifts encountered while negotiating an environment on foot – my work can also be situated within a practice that is durational and protracted: what Justin Remes (2015) calls the cinema of stasis, citing practitioners as diverse as Douglas Gordon, Larry Gottheim, Takahiko Iimura, Derek Jarman, Kurt Kren, June Paik, Michael Snook, Sam Taylor-Wood, Bill Viola and Andy Warhol; what scholars and critics such as Erika Balsom (2007), Mathew Flanagan (2008), Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (2016), Katherine Fusco and Nicole Seymour (2017), and Kornelia Boczkowska (2017, 2020) have contested and theorised as slow cinema, citing artists such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Sharon Lockhart, Kelly Reichardt, Bela Tarr, Tsai Ming-Liang, Wang Bing; and what Greg Taylor (2007), Julian Jason Haladyn (2015), Paul Schrader (2016), Lutz Koepnick (2014, 2017) and Emre Çağlayan (2018), exploring the likes of Chantal Akerman, Bruno Dumont, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Vimukthi Jayasundara, have understood as the cinema of silence, and/or transcendence, and/or wonder, and/or boredom. No doubt somewhere through all of this, or not far from it, can also be found the Surrealists' idea of *le merveilleux*, and of *le hasard objectif* – more of which in due course.

If there is more than a suggestion here of formal continuities between culturally distinct and historically varied forms, it is partly due to my conscious exploitation of them: as drawn out by this supporting text, my practice can be positioned in multiple ways, investigating and

materialising as it does the dialectical interrelations between structure, sequence, stillness, duration, disruption, play. In the spirit of repetition, I reiterate: this is a cinema of simultaneity. Through its combined strategies, my film practice solicits a highly reflexive mode not unlike walking itself: indeed, this thesis links a particular mode of film production with ideas of walking as a specific mode of urban engagement. Sorkin (2013): "Walking is not simply an occasion of observation, but an analytic instrument" (89). In this two-pronged methodology, the walk itself provides a broad survey that yields a more qualitative set of data: a videographic sound-image, the outcome of various artistic decisions arrived at through a set of aesthetic variables which were themselves taken from the landscape encountered during the walk. If walking can be defined as "a strategic device for a kind of reconnaissance into the changing territories of the city" (Shukaitis 2014: 257), it is the film apparatus that both documents and concretises the findings gathered. I will return to these distinctions in clarifying the aims and methods of the present research towards the end of this introduction. Before that, I provide a few words on the particular type of walk that I took as my method, and on its distinctly urban character.

II. The Stalk: Sinclair and the City

As part of a sequence – a trek downriver, a circumnavigation of an urban centre, a city-wide traipse to sites located at exponentially remote distances – distinctions between otherwise disparate urban pockets can be made: a document of a city's polychronicity, the ways in which its social and biological rhythms intersect with its mechanised and industrialised sites of production, its timetabled cycles (bus routes, train journeys, freight schedules), the interplay of contingencies and givens that define the urban experience in terms of its rhythmicity and flow. As Robin James Smith and Tom Hall (2013) note, attending to such rhythmicity "offers an opportunity to glimpse, and retain, something of the complexity of the urban everyday" (91). Such attention constitutes, through a combination of certain techniques, a politics of looking and listening in which the trajectories and entanglements of urban life are engaged with in speculative, imaginative and critical ways.

While at first glance my practice as a walker and filmmaker is not intrinsically rooted to the city, it did emerge from and in response to my experiences, as a professional film critic, of an urban-centric festival landscape dictated by broader political currents and institutionalised strategies to commodify and rationalise cultural life. To put this in more tangible terms, my market-dependence as a worker and practice as a walker were and are inextricably bound to the

urban hub: to cultural events whose defining feature is their intensified congregation of capital, what Henri Lefebvre (2004) calls "a growth of human agglomeration or accumulation" (94). While I break down this context in further detail in the third chapter of this text, it is useful for the moment to note how the means by which I focus upon the rhythms, textures and audiovisual ambiences of public infrastructures and architectures roots my practice to the urban. While my walks are planned in terms of their predetermined directions and prescribed destinations, they exploit and depend upon an infrastructure that facilitates spontaneity and ad hoc forms of sustenance: to invert this logic, imagine the solitary filmmaker setting out on an 18-mile trek through barren, remote landscapes without so much as a bag of crisps or vending machine. One measure or guarantee of the urban, then, might be the extent to which the walker can begin such a walk on the reasonable assumption there will be opportunities to pick up food and sustenance en route. Intuiting these practical matters, with the camera bag on my back and a tripod over my shoulder, I narrowed and delimited my geography of interest accordingly.

Originating in Leagrave, Luton, the River Lea is 42 miles in length. The stretch I navigated in 2015, and again in 2017 to make *Lea River Bridges*, was a conscious reversal of the walk Iain Sinclair undertakes in the prologue to *London Orbital* (2003). Sinclair, Welsh-born but a resident of Hackney for what was then three (and which is now five) decades, has made London his career project, tracing its ley-lines and the infernal mysteries they unlock. In what Robert Sheppard (2007) notes as a decades-long intratextual project, Sinclair has documented the tectonic shifts – some gradual, others sudden – in London's urban-cultural fabric through an obsessive, idiosyncratic lens and with a distinctive, impressive penmanship. Sinclair's river trek is a literal and symbolic bolt up the meridian line of zero longitude – which the Lea more or less follows – in retreat from what he interprets as the capital's latest avatar for neoliberal encroachment: the Millennium Dome. He describes his amble as an "urge to walk away from the Teflon meteorite on Bugsby's Marshes. A white thing had been dropped in the mud of the Greenwich peninsula" (3). If the Dome could be perceived as both folly and forewarning of future disasters under New Labour, Sinclair could also imagine the radius of its blast zone stretching to the circular M25 – whose ribbon was cut, in October 1986, by Margaret Thatcher. "The ripples had to stop somewhere. The city turned inside-out. Rubbish blown against the perimeter fence. A journey, a provocation. An escape. Keep moving, I told myself, until you hit tarmac, the outer circle. The point where London loses it, gives up its ghosts" (ibid). I was, by contrast, an outsider: born in Gateshead a year after London's ring-road opened to traffic, and 12

years old when construction work ended on the Millennium Dome. Just as Sinclair's walk, his half-joking attempt at an exit, was inspired by personal prejudice, it made more sense for me to trace the Lea inbound: as a new arrival. There were symbols to feed my psychogeographic vision: starting at Waltham Abbey, purported burial place of Harold II, England's last Saxon king, I would stride south down the Lea Valley to one of the river's two mouths – Limehouse Basin or Bow Creek – ending at the Thames, a far more famous river that has in many ways defined the city as a whole. It was to be a tribute along a tributary, returning what Geoff Nicholson (2010) describes as the lost art of walking to London, "a city that needs, that demands, to be explored on foot" (40). This was both method and aim: a self-contained A-to-B march, a retracing and a reversal in homage: walking, drifting.

As is widely recognised, Guy Debord conceptualised drifting as the dérive, a key strategy undergirding psychogeography, as it emerged as part of the Situationist International's project of Marxist critique between 1957 and 1972 – and as it has continued in recent years, in a revived, reconceptualised form. Debord, disdainful of the ways in which consumption and production under capitalism were affecting social relations, prescribes a re-emphasis upon and engagement with the everyday. He defines psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (2006: 8). "The adjective *psychogeographical*," he goes on, "retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery" (ibid; emphasis in original). More specifically, Debord defines the dérive as "a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences. The dérive entails playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll" (ibid). In an attempt to delimit its political evolution, much has been written about the dérive. Merlin Coverley (2010), in a useful if by no means comprehensive overview of psychogeography, contextualises the general practice of walking within the framework of contemporary urban living: "in cities that are increasingly hostile to the pedestrian, it inevitably becomes an act of subversion" (12). Because of its comparative slowness, and its subjective vantage point, walking "is seen as contrary to the spirit of the modern city … the street-level gaze that walking requires allows one to challenge the official representation of the

city by cutting across established routes and exploring those marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked by the city's inhabitants" (ibid).

Although he acknowledges, following Debord, the dérive as both an extension of the "surrealist practice of automatism, in which the unconscious was given free rein" (74) as well as a politically charged expansion of the "aimless drifting" epitomised by the figure of the Parisian flaneur (ibid), Coverley locates psychogeography's recent revival in London, citing writers such as Sinclair and J.G. Ballard, and filmmakers such as Patrick Keiller, as practitioners of a particular form of urban engagement. "As the Situationist movement petered out," he writes, "it was in Shepperton that J.G. Ballard was composing a series of novels depicting the extreme behavioural responses provoked by the new suburban hinterlands of motorways and retail parks" (25). While such continuities, etched out across disparate geographies, are made possible by the wide applicability of psychogeography – a result of its "pleasing vagueness", and the frequent playfulness with which its tenets were espoused – they also point to the difficulties of systematising and historicising it as a coherent body of theoretical and/or artistic work. In suggesting such a discrete body of creative practitioners as the leading names in contemporary psychogeography, Coverley de-emphasises the overtly political leanings of the Situationist International. "These works demonstrate," he posits, "that it is the novelist rather than the theoretician who is best able to capture the relationship between the urban environment and human behaviour" (116). Put another way, it is the artist not the activist who is better equipped to undertake and/or encapsulate psychogeographical research. Read in such a manner, with an emphasis on processes rather than outcomes, and on a mode of artistic production necessarily divorced from a mass movement, psychogeography is an experiential method in place of a programmatic science: it becomes an imaginative creative practice. Moreover, in their playful intensity and relentlessly eccentric reworking of the city, works such as Sinclair's *Lud Heat* (1978) and Keiller's *London* (1994) can be situated in direct lineage to London-based visionaries such as William Blake, Daniel Defoe, Thomas de Quincy, Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Machen. For Coverley, these artists prefigure psychogeography as defined and monopolised by the Situationists, not just in their aims but also their methods.

Such assertions are contentious. By framing it against a collage of works that both follow and predate it (sometimes by centuries), approaches such as Coverley's risk stripping psychogeography of its political intentions – intentions that were ineluctably bound to questions specific to the political character of everyday life under post-war Western European social

democracy and the state bureaucracy of the USSR. Again, a large part of this de-politicisation might be explained by the ambiguity, hyperbole, liveliness and frequent impenetrability of Debord's own theoretical output. Thus Simon Sadler (1999) has defined psychogeography as nothing more than a "playful, cheap, and populist … artistic activity carried out in the everyday space of the street rather than in the conventional art spaces of the gallery or theatre" (69). In the 2000s, the appropriation of psychogeography by the mainstream – its incorporation into the very currents against which the Situationists were opposed (Albright 2003: 89) – appeared to reach its logical culmination in Will Self's "Psychogeography" column for the *Independent*, and an anthology of essays under the same name published in 2007. Self's idea of the dérive, in contrast to Debord's, often included fixed destinations and predetermined itineraries. For Nicholson (2010), "the most obvious problem with Debord's definition [of the dérive] is that it's hard to see that there were any 'laws' whatsoever about the way we experience environments as we walk. Rather, there's a cluster of imprecise and frequently conflicting personal impressions and preferences … It doesn't seem like something you need to build theory out of it: it really isn't all that *clever*" (48-9; emphasis in original).

While flippant dismissals like Nicholson's allow for a great number of writers, artists, filmmakers and photographers to be viewed as psychogeographers – and, as Bob Trubshaw (2009: 87) points out, Debord's initial definition of psychogeography encompasses a much broader range of approaches than those outlined by Coverley – those seeking an historical or genealogical understanding of the Situationist International, as well as its political legacy and intellectual value today, are understandably frustrated. As Adam Barnard (2004) suggests, the very idea of demoting revolutionary activism, mapped against explicitly defined political outcomes, in favour of a de-politicised artistic practice was anathema to Debord (105-6). In fact, the Situationist International underwent repeated internal divisions along these lines during its 15 years of existence; as early as 1961 the schism between its political and aesthetic wings had made itself clear. By 1962, there was a definitive split between members mobilising around artistic questions and those, led by Debord, who demanded a revolutionary praxis "independent of all aesthetic considerations" (quoted in Barnard 109). In 1964, paraphrasing Marx, an S.I. editorial read: "So far the philosophers and artists have only interpreted situations, the point now is to transform them" (ibid 112). Some have nevertheless attempted to reclaim the dérive as a key tenet of psychogeography's political project. While Stevphen Shukaitis (2014) accepts that "the basic idea of the dérive is as a form of drifting through a territory to investigate its forces of

attraction and the shaping of experience and emotion in that territory" (257), he is quick to note that "Debord and the S.I. both specifically reject the study of the everyday as a form of sociological description and as a form of artistic practice" (ibid). This rejection, Shukaitis goes on to say, echoing Barnard, "informed the split of the S.I. in the early 1960s, as the early emphasis on artistic in relation to political practice was rejected in favour of a more directly political practice" (ibid). An interventionist framework is by its nature delineable and quantifiable: the dérive must leave something of itself upon the environment it negotiates. The psychogeographer must *impress*.

Such demands, however, favour some psychogeographers more than others. As I have already suggested, embarking upon a directionless wander through unfamiliar urban territory could for various and obvious reasons be dangerous, even life-threatening, depending on the wanderer as well as the terrain. No prizes, here, for recognising the relative advantages that a white anglophone male has in undertaking a practice that emerged from the leisure practices of imperial Europe. On these grounds, reasserting the political dimension of the dérive can also be a means by which to mount legitimate critiques against it. The drift, according to Tom McDonough (2009), might be interpreted as a "search for an encounter with otherness, spurred on in equal parts by the exploration of pockets of class, ethnic and racial differences in the post-war city, and by frequent intoxication" (11). Similarly, Sadler (1999) suggests that such modes of exploration are rooted in ideas of territorial conquest: "Like the imperialist powers they officially opposed, it was as if [S]ituationists felt that the exploration of alien quarters (of the city rather than the globe) would advance civilisation" (81). More recently, Sharanya Murali (2016) has cited both of these scholars to contextualise the very idea of the dérive as a practice that is historically embedded in both whiteness and maleness (200). Rooted as it is to European modernity, the dérive for Murali is codified and gendered according to heteronormative notions of adventure. She cites Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner (2012), who point to "an orthodoxy of walking" concretised by "the reiteration of a particular genealogy – or fraternity – which includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, André Breton and Guy Debord" (236). A London-centric overview of psychogeography such as Coverley's bears this out: different city, perhaps, but the same old method employed by the same old kind of practitioner, whose "own gendered identity as a man free to roam the streets … is not actively considered in undertaking this work" (Murali 2016: 201).

For Phil Smith (2010), the undead political heritage of the dérive has made it once again a legitimate site of artistic practice: "The corpse walks" (106). Providing a partial survey of the kinds of contemporary practitioners of the dérive to be found under Debord's initially broad definition, Smith points to John Davies (Liverpool), Frédéric Dufaux (Paris), Kinga Araya (Rome), Kate Pocrass (San Francisco), and many others. Two further examples counter both the challenges that urban planning often poses to foot-based human mobility as well as the received notion of the dérive as a directionless meander: Stephen Graham, the early twentieth-century trapper who "would draw an arbitrary straight route on his map in order to enjoy the negotiations with, and hospitalities of, tenants and landowners whose property he crossed" (ibid); and the artist Richard Long, whose 1987 work/walk *Crossing Stones* saw him navigate his way from the east coast of England to the west coast of Wales (and back again) with a stone from each beach, "reifying the walk as a settling of accounts in a dead economy, a parody of barter or exchange" (108). This latter example reconciles the notion of an artistic practice defined by walking with a more politicised conception of the dérive. It also reflects, perhaps, a more fully reflexive approach to the dérive, not as a directionless meander that must nevertheless have definable aims, but as a destination-oriented spatial practice that is also subsequently durational. In this, Long and other walker-artists anticipate the epic treks conducted by the likes of Will Self and Iain Sinclair. Not only is the straight line in conceptual defiance of a built-up environment and urban infrastructure designed to predetermine and monopolise circulations of capital; the very mode of walking – with its rhythmic emphasis on the durational march – also lends itself to a different perceptual framework by which to navigate the city. In *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997), Sinclair recounts a straight-line march across London. "The concept of 'strolling', aimless urban wandering, the flaneur, had been superseded. We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and unsponsored. The stalker was our role-model … The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how" (75).

How? Why? These questions are integral to an engagement with and deployment of the dérive within a scholarly context, for they satisfy the process- and outcome-oriented nature of academic research. Rationale is key. Which might account for why Smith, in illustrating how the dérive has drifted "from its theoretical, anti-aesthetic roots" (2010: 106), frames a writer like Sinclair with scepticism, as part of a "distinctive anglo-psychogeographical literature" (ibid) whose adoption of the dérive has helped to bastardise its political potential. Sinclair – who, in fairness, has toyed frequently and to varying degrees with embracing and rejecting the label of

psychogeographer that others impose upon him (one suspects it is a burden that is nonetheless of benefit to the promotion of his work) – tends to explicate his theses obliquely, or else bury them in a formidably bulky prose style that foregrounds the aesthetic experience, trusting and testing the patience of readers in a way not unlike the ostensibly incident-free long takes of James Benning. In their insistently subjective, knowingly irreverent, defiantly un-systematic and comically self-mythologising nature, Sinclair's written accounts of the terrains he tramps are not quantifiable in terms of their social reach and therefore their value as direct political actions must also come into question. They romanticise the method at the same time as they obscure it: the artist's prerogative.

This problem, if it is one, tends to be compounded when the work resulting from a dérive takes a non-literary form. As standalone artefacts, for instance, neither the image nor the musical composition elucidates upon the labour, the decision-making or the intellectual rationale contained within it in the same way, or with the same ease, as a text-based account.[2] Traditional scholarship, pressured to present its findings in as clear a form as possible, is prose-bound. This is not to say other forms are impossible. Rather, I contend that a different set of assumptions and criteria are required if, say, a purely image-based response to a dérive is to have political meaning. It is here, perhaps, where the Surrealist notions of *le merveilleux* (the marvellous) and *le hasard objectif* (objective chance) are particularly helpful to an understanding of both my cinematic and psychogeographic interventions as well as the ways in which my practice combines documentarian and more mediated forms to approximate the perplexities, multiplicities and revelations of urban experience. This specifically cinematic combination, I contend, activates the viewer's unconscious in ways not unlike the Surrealists' pursuit of the marvellous and of objective chance – two features key to Surrealist image-making practice, in which the unexpected and/or wondrous may emerge from material or matter ostensibly free of such qualities, and in which the otherwise anonymous and insignificant are transformed into revelatory portals and new emotional and aesthetic experiences (see Gaycken 2012; Bohn 2019). If my films deploy a gaze that promotes the mundane and everyday on the one hand, they also privilege a specific form of seeing – and of *receiving* – images on the other. Christian Keathley (2006) links the Surrealist's pursuit of and encounter with objective chance to the filmmaker's embrace of cinema's automated image-making processes, which translates to "opening oneself to those fortuitous,

[2] And even then, readers are only ever granted access to the *published* draft.

chance encounters that are regularly *captured* by the camera in spite of the operator's intentions, and that form the basis of cinephiliac moments" (65; emphasis in original).

The question, then, is one of communication: of perception, reception, and – in the form of a particular kind of film practice, such as mine – the attention these can often demand and activate. While Keathley asserts Surrealism as a "strategy of reception" (67), Oliver Gaycken (2012) claims the openness required of such a strategy to be attitudinal (311). When Smith (2010) notes that "[p]art of the problematic of the contemporary dérive is a lack of an accumulative discussion of the details of its practice", that "[n]on-literary accounts of 'drifts' are often less than engaging, failing to communicate atmospheres, intensities and re-arrangements" (118), I confess to a feeling of opportunity. Challenge accepted: in their combination of what Gaycken (2012: 311) terms the diachronic dimension and synchronic dualism of instances of objective chance – their sequentiality, that is, as well as their simultaneity – my films contribute an aesthetic form that is more properly and formally suited to the dérive. In their reliance upon a documentary image that encompasses a complex set of properties such as stasis and slowness, my films also seek and execute an openness to chance and wonder. These qualities are mobilised in such a way – through mediation, intervention and stylisation – that atmospheres, intensities and re-arrangements can be communicated, revealed, made revelatory.

III. The Stakes: Lines of Departure

The films constituting this thesis document and cinematise (stylistically respond to) a series of urban walks undertaken in three capital cities – London, Ljubljana and Zagreb – between 2013 and 2018. They question the extent to which a film practice might approximate the structural, sequential and durational qualities of a particular kind of dérive: the Sinclairian stalk. In approximating and adapting such qualities, in responding to the recurrent features encountered within a distinct urban environment, the films adopt and combine techniques commonly associated with experimental film and the cinematic avant-garde – the steady-stare camera, the uninterrupted long take, stillness and repetition, a general eschewal of contextual information, and an emphasis upon the incidental. In combination, these techniques call attention to themselves and solicit a mode of spectatorship that is itself attentive and reflexive, a mode in which the incidental emerges as a potential frontline for everyday struggle.

Each of the chapters that follows focuses on a single film. In the first, I discuss *Lea River Bridges* as an example of a structural film, examining the ways in which its structural qualities,

which were themselves informed by pre-existing features of a built environment, allow repetition and rhythm to emerge not merely as key stylistic traits but also as central thematic concepts within a depiction and conception of urban space. Establishing and outlining the notion of narrative expectancy, that upon which conventional cinema depends and which structural films exploit, I go on to examine Jonathan Perel's *Toponymy* (2015) as a recent example of how structural films can engage with urban space in ways that approximate and call attention to the ways in which such space is planned and executed – as a creative and imaginative means, that is, of uncovering the political intentions behind urban space. As my argument here is constructed around an analysis of the film's visual and narrative repetitions, I then examine the ways in which *Lea River Bridges*, responding as it does to the repeated features of a river trek through London, plays with ideas of repetition through the dual and contradictory notion of a "found landscape" and a "constructed image" – through the exemplifying tension, that is, between onscreen fixity and offscreen chance intrinsic to the film's notion of repetition. I then go on to propose ways in which the film may be understood in rhythmic terms, in order to propose and summarise some of the ways in which the structural film is especially apposite in capturing walking as a rhythmic and spatial practice.

The second chapter focuses on *Lubiana Laibach*, a 63-minute film shot in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Taking the city's Path of Comradeship and Remembrance and its series of stone monuments commemorating antifascist resistance during the Second World War as its structuring device, the film extends and alters some of the strategies deployed in *Lea River Bridges*, expanding upon the former's tripod-fixed long takes with the introduction of extended dissolves. My first focus in this chapter explores repetition through the lens of stillness, positioning the film within a consideration of the cinema of stasis. Since stillness is understood in tandem with motion, I argue, duration and slowness play an important part in its dialectic; the second part of this chapter consequently situates the film within the field of durational cinema. As I argue, my practice explores ideas of simultaneity both within the urban spaces to which it responds and in the strategies it exploits; finally, then, I consider the exhibition context, and the cinema auditorium more specifically, as a physically structuring and cultural and socially codified space in which the very concepts of stasis and duration mean certain things and from which an appreciation of the film's simultaneity – and a consideration of urban multiplicity – can take place. Indeed, throughout this chapter, I will also consider the ways in which the formal strategies of *Lubiana Laibach* expand *Lea River Bridges*' diachronic survey of London to

encompass a synchronic snapshot of Ljubljana that imbricates past and present, through a reflection and meditation upon the city's cultural identity and its memorialisation of political occupation, loss and antifascist victory as evoked through commemorative stone monuments. In considering the film's formal strategies and how these instantiate ideas of temporal uncertainty and experiential simultaneity, I am compelled to acknowledge the ways in which *Lubiana Laibach* can be distinguished from the other two films in the thesis by the degree to which and especially intensified methods by which its imagery is devised, manipulated, authored. Useful to this discussion of simultaneity through intensified stylisation is a brief comparison between the film's use of cut-free dissolves and the single-sentence stream-of-consciousness of Mathias Énard's 2009 novel, *Zone*.

In the third chapter, I focus on *9 x 45*, which I shot in Zagreb, Croatia. A moving-image document of a pre-existing urban installation sited at locations across the city, the film emerged as an exploration of the ways in which the structural, sequential and durational can be applied when the walking route itself is less structured and predetermined than in the previous films. Given its investigation of play and disruption, it is here that I discuss the broader circumstances from which my practice as a walker emerged. In discussing such circumstances, I position my personal and professional life as a film critic within the wider historical moment of twenty-first-century capitalism and its never-not-on working conditions; in doing so, I propose the dérive as a vital means of re-establishing a grounded and located practice that is playful and disruptive against the demands of aspatial and atemporal telecommunications that define contemporary urban life. I secondly examine some of the problems specific to the walk undertaken for the film, and the decisions I arrived at in negotiating these problems. In discussing some of the merits and what I perceive to be failures of the film, I finally consider the film with reference to my abiding interest in the strategies I drew upon in making it, focusing especially on the tripod-fixed, steady-stare shot and the cinema of attractions.

Though the arrangement of these chapters suggests that the films function individually, they do encompass a suite of works that investigates the chief inquiry underpinning this thesis: the different ways in which the destination-oriented dérive can be advanced as a legitimate form of urban engagement, constituting as it does the tension between fixity and chance so intrinsic to city life. More specifically, I investigate the extent to which a film practice that combines a cinema of structure, a cinema of stasis and a cinema of attractions might approximate the urban walk's sense of structure, sequence and duration. Articulating the tensions between structure,

repetition and rhythm, between stasis, slowness and simultaneity, and between disruption, perception and play, this text instrumentalises my synthesis of walking and film. It contributes a deeper understanding of the ways in which both can be considered as distinct practices that take meaning from one another in terms not only of form but also of the armature they provide for joined-up and dialectical thinking. To be clear, however, this thesis is not a sociological study in itself but an investigation and demonstration of the dérive's potential value in sociological terms: though it is beyond both the scope of this text and my expertise as a researcher, through a combination of cinematic techniques, each film here provides an opportunity to rethink and reflect upon urban space in critical and imaginative ways. Likewise, the present research is less concerned with defining, poeticising or cinematizing the edgelands – of which there is limited mention hereafter – than proposing ways in which an urban milieu might be productively framed. As both a walker and a filmmaker, I do think traits of a city's character can be revealed by opting for the route less taken, by looking at architectures and infrastructures not traditionally promoted as valuable. As such, this supporting text privileges formal considerations of the films alongside the practical decisions taken in making them: the three chapters that follow analyse and position my films in terms of the aesthetic strategies by which they assert and activate a spatial politics – a politics in which looking and listening become acts of decoding and key tools in the critical framing of urban space.

Chapter 1. Downriver: Structure, Repetition and Rhythm in *Lea River Bridges*

> It is a cinema of relationships.
>
> — Regina Cornwell (1979: 90)

In *Visionary Film*, his formative history of the American cinematic avant-garde, P. Adams Sitney (2002) defines the structural film as that "in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified… it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film" (348). As their name suggests, structural films take their meaning primarily from their structure: they prioritise form, often, over what might traditionally be thought of as content. "The structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline" (ibid). Originally formulated in 1974, these oft-quoted observations brought, at the time, a diverse range of North American experimental film artists under the same banner: Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr, Joyce Wieland. In the decades since, artists such as Annabel Nicolson, Malcolm LeGrice, Peter Gidal, David Parsons, John Woodman, William Raban, Sharon Lockhart, James Benning and Peter Greenaway have been described, discussed and platformed as key proponents of the structural film. To this woefully but inevitably selective roster I would add more recent examples such as Jonathan Perel, Nicky Hamlyn, Aline Magrez and Jessie Growden.

The conceptual umbrella Sitney first proposed for the structural film was not without problems. Writing half a decade later, Bruce Jenkins (1981) contested the legitimacy of the term as an all-encompassing theory, perceiving a tendency in Sitney's method to derive theoretical assumptions from selective empirical data and sometimes inaccurate axiomatic descriptions of the exemplifiers in question (11). Nevertheless, critical legacies persist, despite what Erika Balsom (2021) refers to as "a classic case of the narcissism of small differences" (79). Sitney observes four features common to the structural film: the fixed camera, the flicker effect, loop printing and re-photography off the screen. Such features were delimited, in the 1970s, as experimentations innate to, and made possible by, analogue film. At least where flicker effects, print looping and re-photography were concerned, the limits – and, by proxy, the potential – of film as a material were no longer merely thought of as the invisible tools by which cinema could be made. They could also be foregrounded as the chief focus of the medium itself. In the digital age, though the technological means may have changed, it is possible for a film to deploy

corresponding strategies in order to promote, as its chief and centralised focus, what Kenneth White (2010) calls the "mechanical functions of the cinematic apparatus itself" (372).

Acknowledging the simplifying tendencies to which Jenkins refers, the present discussion nonetheless follows the assumption that it is also possible for a film's overriding shape to be determined by pre-existing structures, and that it is also possible for this overriding shape to inform, as Sitney puts it, the "primal impression of the film". This latter remark implies of course a spectatorship – or a spectator upon whom a primal impression is made – affirming Regina Cornwell's (1979) argument that the structural film is "a highly intellectual experience at the same time that it is perceptual and sensuous" (90). In specific regard to the categorical features of the structural film outlined by Sitney, my practice focuses upon the fixed frame, and upon its effects in combination with particular rhythmic and durational strategies. Indeed, though the structural film cannot claim a monopoly on the fixed frame as an isolated device – plenty of other film forms utilise this technique – the combination of the fixed frame with such rhythmic and durational strategies is a key consideration in discussing my practice. The following discussion considers the structural qualities of *Lea River Bridges*, a film shaped by and made in response to a walk that in its own way adopted structural characteristics. In doing so, the discussion explicates some ways in which my film practice emerges from my walking practice, or rather how I deploy structural strategies in my filmmaking to approximate an experience, or my own experience, of walking. As will become clear, *Lea River Bridges* was made in response to a particular walk, and its images were composed in direct response to the particular built environments encountered along it. As such, the film is "about" the walk and those environments as much as it is "about" the formal strategies deployed in capturing it. Any hesitation implied here regarding my choice of preposition is down to the expectations that a term such as "about" brings, denoting as it does a subject to be concerned with, or to focus upon, which may at first seem to contradict common understandings of the structural film as privileging form over content, to the point where any thematic subject or subtextual meaning is de facto precluded. The first task here, then, is to liberate a working definition of the structural film from the historic, medium-specific moment in which the term came about. Put simply, structural films in their early days were rarely considered as being *about* something beyond shared assumptions with regard to the standardised techniques in narrative cinema, which they drew upon, exploited and challenged through a range of formal strategies. As illustrated here, however, while the structural film was initially understood as a means of promoting the cinematic apparatus and its limitations to be its

chief focus – to make the conventional tools of narrative cinema into a formal inquiry, thereby rendering the conventionally invisible techniques radically visible – it has also been expanded, through the innovations and political interests of individual practitioners, so that it might also be "about something".

The first section of this chapter briefly considers Ken Jacobs' *The Doctor's Dream* (1977), as analysed in 1979 by Michael Kirby, to outline a key idea that underpins the challenges that structural films pose to conventional cinema: that of narrative expectancy, and its predication on shared audience assumptions. Following this, the first section details the ways in which a more recent structural film, Jonathan Perel's *Toponymy* (2015), can establish and play with narrative expectancy to explore and propose an engagement with a subject as specific as Argentina's fascist dictatorship – not despite its structure being predetermined and simplified, as Sitney might have it, but because of and through such predetermination and simplification. Since repetition plays a key role in what constitutes narrative expectancy – an understanding and assumption, that is, of what comes next – the second and third sections of this chapter consider *Lea River Bridges* in terms of the repeated features that conditioned both its production and my experience of the walk that informed it. Since the conceptual strategy of the film, like *Toponomy*'s, was to *minimise variables* so as to *emphasise variation*, the second section focuses on the ways in which my film engages with and negotiates ideas of repetition, particularly through the dual and contradictory notion of a "found landscape" and a "constructed image". Finally, in the third section, I propose ways in which *Lea River Bridges* may be understood as rhythmic, describing some of the decisions I made and how these may help articulate my practice as mutually informed by walking and the structural film. In doing so, I will propose and summarise some of the ways in which the structural film is particularly well-positioned to capture walking as a spatial practice.

1.1 Expectations: Establishing and Exploiting

The progenitor was Warhol. For Sitney, Andy Warhol's initial strategy, his unique gift, was parody (349). Where the likes of Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren had advanced film as a medium that was particularly suited to approximating the sensory experience or narrative logic of the dream state, Warhol made *Sleep* (1963), in which he recorded nothing more (or less) than a man sleeping. At five hours and twenty minutes, the film took notions of the quotidian to a new cinematic extreme. The gimmick was length: what happens, *Sleep* dared viewers to ask, if you set

the camera down and watch nothing? *Is* it nothing? As Sitney notes, while theorist-practitioners like Brakhage and Peter Kubelka "expounded the law that a film must not waste a frame and that a single filmmaker must control all the functions of the creation… Warhol made the profligacy of footage the central fact of all of his early films, and he advertised his indifference to direction, photography, and lighting. He simply turned the camera on and walked away" (ibid). I will return more fully to the durational element of Warhol's innovations in the next chapter. For now, I take up the notion of structure as a formal query – a device, that is, by which to challenge or reject common notions of how a film narrative might function. Writing as the early structural films were beginning to prompt scholarship and study, Michael Kirby (1979) observed the disruptive qualities of the structural film, how they might be seen as playful riffs upon the engrained viewing practices associated with and required of narrative cinema. For Kirby, an analysis of Ken Jacobs' *The Doctor's Dream* (1977) highlights the ways in which structural films make apparent the codes of viewing, the shared assumptions, by which traditional narrative films operate (99). Jacobs' film is made entirely from (re)editing: of a half-hour television film, which it quotes, chops up, reassembles. As a work of re-assemblage, *The Doctor's Dream* challenges the continuity of the original work, drawing attention to the mechanics of traditional film storytelling and the modes of viewership that they both depend upon and shape.

At their most affecting, structural films expose the arbitrariness of standardised film grammar. They pose challenges to the schemes through which a particular form of storytelling develops and acquires cultural dominance, and they encourage alternative modes of viewership. Of course, the narrative film – its systems and patterns – also had to be developed, normalised, engrained. Writing six decades after the first standardisations of feature-length narrative filmmaking took hold, Kirby notes that the "way of telling a story in film has its own logic that engenders certain expectancies about technique" (99). From this logic emerges a tradition: a set of standards mutually understood by both storyteller and viewer. And it is in this mutual understanding that narrative expectancy lies. Though the individual techniques Jacobs deploys in *The Doctor's Dream* are no more demonstrative or unusual than those identifiable in a narrative film, their aggregate effect is one of disruption: Jacobs, writes Kirby, "brings to conscious awareness the traditional mechanism of expectancy structure" (ibid). The result of Jacobs opting not to follow certain shots with certain other shots, for instance – as might reasonably be expected by anyone whose viewing habits have been shaped by standardised film grammar – is

one of discontinuity. Traditional expectations regarding narrative technique are upended, challenged, made explicit.

The Doctor's Dream, for Kirby, affirms structure itself as the chief focus of the structural film (101). The focus is twofold: because structural films are concerned with formal arrangements, they are also concerned with viewer expectations – with the relationship, that is, between viewer and film. In each of my own films constituting this thesis, such concerns find expression in an attention and adherence to the repeated patterns of a pre-existing environment – which are highlighted, made explicit, through the formal arrangement of images. In turn, this arrangement places deliberate demands upon the viewer – and, likewise, asks deliberate questions of them. In what ways does *Lea River Bridges*' sequence of compositionally similar shots form and disrupt expectancies of narrative and technique? What kinds of questions might be prompted when watching *Lubiana Laibach*, a 63-minute sequence whose almost-constant visual change is offset by the apparent stasis and fixity of its frame? And to what extent might *9 x 45*, a film whose shot length decreases exponentially as the film itself unfolds, provoke an active process of decoding in the viewer? These questions are all specific to the respective formal relationships that define the structure of each film, but they are also to do with modes of spectatorship.

Structural films instantiate an ambivalence towards their apparent subject matter by de-emphasising the narrative cinema's traditionally emotive methods. I say apparent, here, because while I would agree with Kirby that structural films may not comment or elucidate upon their visual content or subtextual meaning, I would contest the idea that they are necessarily and purely devoid of interest beyond formal considerations. As argued here, the artistic point of ignition in making *Lea River Bridges* was not merely the formal relationship between one shot and another. It was also the distinct properties of each location, the discrete characteristics of each bridge, as legitimate points of inquiry in themselves. Though the film's formal design, highlighting variation through repetition, might be understood purely in formal terms, its deliberately equal allocation of time to each environment says something about the validity of an attentiveness that is all-encompassing and non-hierarchal: each location is given its due.

Likewise, Kirby's distinction between structural film and what he terms "structuralist film" is now somewhat dated. Whereas Kirby and his contemporaries were keen to see differences, I have – in line with more current scholarship and recent criticism – been conflating the two, referring to "structural film" as a matter of preference. When Kirby refers to *The Doctor's Dream* as "structuralist", it is because of the film's emphasis upon internal

relationships, correspondences and differences, and upon the mechanisms of spectatorship that it highlights. For Kirby, such emphases embody different foci to the *structural* film, in which he observes a general emphasis upon "the overall form, shape, outline or configuration, particularly through the use of the single extended shot or a minimal number of shots, [which] call attention to qualities and properties of the film" (102). As important, observable and legitimate as these differences may have once seemed, they appear negligible if not redundant today due to the innovations of artists who have made a point in making work that succeeds at both: films, in other words, whose focus is how their overall formal shape is understood in relation to their internal correspondences (or, as we shall see, their rhythms).

Toponymy (2015), by Argentine filmmaker Jonathan Perel, is one such film; and I reference and discuss it here as validation enough that the historical distinction between the structural film and the structuralist film is indeed a thing of history. Divided into four durationally and structurally equal parts, *Toponymy* begins as a sequence of tripod-fixed shots, firstly of blueprints and other official documents relating to a town plan, and then secondly of various street-level views captured on camera in the town itself, each of which has some communal function: town hall, gymnasium, school, stadium, and so on. Each section contains 58 shots, and each shot lasts 15 seconds. The ostensibly straightforward, undemonstrative design of the first section registers as unusual only in retrospect, when the second section – documenting another town – begins to unfold in the same manner. Not just in the same manner, but via the same sequence of shots: town hall, gymnasium, school, stadium, and so on. By the time the third and then fourth sections have ended, the film's otherwise distinct sections are connected through their formal repetition – provoking an increasing expectancy of narrative in the viewer.

To describe the film in such terms is to commit the structural film equivalent of a spoiler. The towns featured in *Toponymy* were all built in Argentina's hilly Tucumán province in 1974. They were built as part of Operation Independence – euphemistically referred to in the official documents photographed in the film as a "Rural Relocation Plan" – a counterrevolutionary campaign conducted by the country's military, whose public purpose was to centralise Tucumán's scattered population but whose actual intention was to overwhelm the left-wing guerrilla movement, which had until then strategised the region's mountainous terrain to its advantage. The four towns depicted in the film still bear the military names by which they were first inaugurated. Hence *Toponymy*: the study of place names. Though prior knowledge of this context will likely colour one's relationship to the images within the film, the sequential form

resists immediate understanding. To track *Toponymy*'s sequences relationally, to check them against one another for continuity, would require a highly developed system of recall. Nevertheless, a broad understanding of the film's internal correspondences is possible without cross-referencing. More importantly, the film's structural element *conditions and enables* such understanding: it is its deliberate design and narrative structure that makes possible an engagement with the continuities between the locations shown. Seen as such, the viewing experience parallels the filmmaker's own research methods: just as our familiarity with these towns is reified with each repetition and disrupted with each subtle deviation, Perel's shooting period involved several revisions instigated by new discoveries:

> Let's say I go to the first town. I shoot the entrance. I shoot every street. I shoot every house. But then I find this strange umbrella form in the plaza, and I'm not sure what it is. Maybe I don't shoot it. But when I go to the second town, I find the same strange umbrella, and I say, "Oh, this is a repetition, I have to shoot it. I have to go back to the other town to shoot it." This went on for a month, finding new places maybe in the third town. Or the other way: finding places in the first and the second but not in the third. This astronomic clock, for example: "Where is the astronomic clock?" (in Pattison 2016a)

Rather than demystifying the artistic process, Perel touches here upon the imaginative possibilities of expectancy. When he talks of his decision to return to a town to study something that had not immediately registered as a recurrent feature, and especially when he implies a feeling of curiosity or even disappointment when not encountering something that he had come to anticipate, the filmmaker affirms the idea that the structural film is a mode of investigation: something built upon anticipation, attention and relational thinking. *Toponymy*'s structure activates an investigatory approach in the viewer, one that is initially characterised by a basic curiosity in terms of visual content: what, exactly, is being shown? Here, Perel's unassuming camera angles, suggestive of a head-height forward-facing glare, precludes a more comprehensive grasp of each town's layout. As patterns emerge, however, the investigatory approach begins to yield a more developed understanding of the film's images – and its sequences – in relation to one another. (This understanding is, we shall see towards the end of this chapter, in rhythmic terms.) Perel has spoken of his decision to separate the corresponding shots of each section, rather than show, say, the town entrances together, or the town halls together, or the gymnasiums: "I will give you one chapter, and when the second chapter starts you will do your work and remember the same beginning. Maybe it's not easy in the second one. It becomes easier in the third chapter and even easier in the fourth" (in Pattison 2016a).

The suggestion here that viewing is a form of work is telling. In *Toponymy*, Perel elicits two forms of viewing-working: there is the simple enough act of watching its quotidian scenes unfold, and there is the cumulative effect of the relational thinking it prompts – a kind of mental arithmetic. Expectancy of signifiers (town one, town two, town three, town four) produces an understanding of the signified (four towns built, with insidious intentions, from largely identical blueprints). As if to stress the importance of this process, Perel retains his 15-second shot duration for the whole film. One might read this as a simple means of allegorising the fascistic government's town-planning, its imposition of grid-like rigidity onto open rural land. Indeed, at worst, the geometric enclosures of the grid contain and exhibit human conquest. Writing of New York, for example, the architect Rem Koolhaas (1994) notes: "The plotting of its streets and blocks announces that the subjugation, if not obliteration, of nature is its true ambition… In its indifference to topography, to what exists, [the grid] claims the superiority of mental construction over reality" (20). Understood in this context, the towns seen in Perel's film exemplify and embody the destructive imperatives of fascism.

Toponymy's sustained 15-second shot duration, however, is also key to the film's own investigatory mode. The length per se is less important, here, than its application as a principle.[1] Although a deepening understanding of what is happening at a broader level in the film might have justified a decrease in shot-length, Perel insists upon durational sameness – as if aware that as one's understanding of the film's structure grows, so too do the implications and gravity of the data collated. The final sequence of *Toponymy*, in which Perel turns his camera to the present-day ruins of former towns and outposts destroyed as part of Operation Independence, bears this out. Shot in the jungle, the film's short coda depicts the original sites of guerrilla action, registering an abrupt change of setting. Whereas in the preceding sections each shot contained a clearly marked monument or structure, the final sequence provides less information with which to guide one's eye. "This idea of not knowing where to look in an image is very important in political terms," Perel says (in Pattison 2016a).

> It's the space of the revolution, where the guerrilla members chose to hide from the military, to create an armed force and take over the government. It was a place of freedom, so I needed to finish the film there. If not, it's a film that the military could have made, in [proudly] showing what they did. (ibid)

[1] Perel could just as easily have decided upon a shot-length of 1.5 seconds, or 150, though I would argue – prejudiced by my familiarity with the film's existing form – that 15 seconds provides a sort of optimum for other elements of the viewing experience to be appreciated.

The power of this final sequence rests in the cumulative effect of the preceding sections. If the structural form of the film has gradually trained the viewer in terms of what to see and how to understand it, the final sequence poses a new challenge. Continuing in the same unassuming manner while abandoning the shot-by-shot structure of the four towns depicted before it, *Toponymy*'s end sequence asks of the viewer one final act of labour: to apply to these final images the relational thinking previously activated and engrained. In doing so, in trying to make connections between these "new" forms of images and the earlier sections, the viewer's narrative expectancy is thwarted, excited, challenged: these "new" spaces visualise displacement, relocation, obliteration. Their status as ruins is the cause and effect of Operation Independence: a mirror image of towns named after military figures. Given its reliance upon recall, Perel's process of viewing-working might be thought of as *re*-viewing/*re*-working: memory as a form of labour. Through such methods, the filmmaker makes conscious the process of confronting a gestalt; his film asserts the uncovering of national and political traumas as a creative act.

1.2 Landscapes: Made and Found

In making aberrations more noticeable, repetition conditions expectancy. The recurrent pictorial compositions in *Lea River Bridges* are shaped by the repeated feature of bridges spanning a river. As its title suggests, this is a specific river, with its own distinct characteristics, and the bridges spanning it do so at discrete points along its course. Each has its own character, depending on its size, material, purpose, when it was built, and how it functions within its surrounding environment. Each scene, in short, documents and responds to its own ecosystem. This simple enough dynamic is what, in his analysis of Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1976), Kenneth White (2010) describes as composition conditioned by "the architectural logic of a specific urban environment" (366). An essay film that maps its director's relationship to Manhattan (through images) against her relationship with her mother (through letters read in voiceover), *News from Home* deploys the visual strategies of a structural film. Throughout, Akerman's compositions emphasise grids through an attention to the intersection of vertical and horizontal planes, in tripod-fixed master shots captured at street corners and on subway platforms, and in lateral-motion shots recorded from moving vehicles. In the latter, the unerringly forward-facing camera is offset by its crab-like sideways movement through space, which articulates the supremacy of the grid. For one to discern the unique qualities of each street corner, each subway platform, each

block, one must seek a pattern and understand it. Conversely, the graphic similarity of disparate shots points to differences in their properties. Comparison (visual process) precedes contrast (relational understanding).

Like Akerman's, my mode of production is, in White's terms, "inspired and constituted by [a] particular built space" (368). Just as New York itself provides *News from Home* with its visual grammar, the River Lea and its bridges provide *Lea River Bridges* its "predetermined system of production" (372). *Lea River Bridges* consists of 44 static, tripod-fixed shots. The first shot is an easterly view of Waltham Abbey, in Essex, Greater London, as seen from the roundabout at which Highbridge Street meets the B194, and the final shot is a westerly view of the River Thames, as seen from Limehouse Basin. In between, there are 42 master shots of bridges, each of which spans the River Lea between Waltham Abbey and Limehouse Basin. Each shot in the film lasts 45 seconds. The bridge compositions are separated by two-second intervals of silent black screen; the bridges themselves are shown in sequence, north to south, as one encounters them while walking along the Lea following the Lee Navigation Towpath, firstly through East London and secondly via Limehouse Cut after the river divides in two at Bow Creek. The bridges are filmed from the same vantage point: from beneath, positioned centrally widthways, and perpendicular to the Lea, which flows through the frame left-to-right or right-to-left depending on whether the towpath runs west or east of the river.

The graphic continuities of *Lea River Bridges*, its consistent compositional approach, may at first evoke a scientific study rather than a work resulting from creative decisions – a presumption that may well be compounded by the film's dry, unpoetic title. I would argue, however, that it is precisely this lack of contextual information that situates the film firmly within a complex set of aesthetic relationships, to do with rhythm and expectancy, stillness and movement, structure and chance. None of these tensions can be understood in isolation, for it is through the sensory experience of watching the film that they are gradually revealed in their totality. These tensions are heightened, in other words, by the absence of contextual information, which might have otherwise "explained" the film or provided clues as to its function and value as an artwork. Without any voiceover, or subtitles, or explanatory endnote, *Lea River Bridges* retains and encourages an absolute trust in, and fascination for, the environments found and presented within it; and, by extension, a trust in and fascination for the ultimate unknowability of the urban space encountered.

Similarly, if the visual grammar of *Lea River Bridges* was determined by the built environments it depicts, so too was its durational system. When preparing to shoot the film, I had no overall length in mind, but knew that I wanted every shot to be the same length so as to enhance the formal relations just mentioned – between rhythm and expectancy, stillness and movement, structure and chance. Having recorded each bridge for a minimum of three minutes and a maximum of seven, I decided upon a shot length of 45 seconds by identifying what I felt could be described, in straightforward narrative terms, as the most action-packed of all the film's scenes. It was the twenty-fifth bridge encountered on the walk, which begins at 19:37 in the final film as seen in figure 1: a railway bridge, over which a train can be heard passing, its reflection seen in a glass building in the background; two people unwittingly vying for attention across river; a steady stream of students passing through the foreground; and – what luck! – a narrowboat passing right-to-left through the frame. Recognising the completion of this latter "action" as a kind of natural source of narrative satisfaction (the viewer hears the boat, sees it enter the frame, and watches it pass through the frame entirely, guiding their gaze as it does so), I timed what felt like the minimum duration required for it to unfold in full. And then I imposed the same length to every other shot.

***Figure 1. Planes of action in* Lea River Bridges**

By minimising and promoting the two chief variables within my control as both cameraman and editor – i.e., the composition of the shot and the duration of the take – I was able to retain authorship of the minimum set of conditions that also enabled many other variables to flourish. These latter differences, encountered from one shot to the next and over the course of the 18-mile journey undertaken for and depicted in the film, include lighting conditions, footfall, architecture, infrastructure, sonic ambience, the overall (and less easily described) *effect* created by all of these in combination. And weather: while in the film's first shot, of Waltham Abbey, it is snowing, as early as the third shot – filmed beneath the M25 – it is discernibly *not* snowing.[2] Similarly, in the fourth shot – of pipework stretching across the Lea to LondonEnergy's EcoPark site, also known as the Edmonton incinerator – the sky is visibly blue. It takes about 20 minutes to walk from the location from which I recorded the film's opening image to the M25 motorway, and a further 90 minutes to EcoPark. I had no control over such meteorological shifts: fluctuations so early in the film, in lighting and the resulting texture of the images, are the outcome of chance. As Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2011) note: "Edgelands do weather very well" (257). It is in this sense that *Lea River Bridges* approximates walking as a sensory method. The film is not merely inspired and constituted by a particular built space; its visual and editorial strategies also emphasise the sequential qualities of walking, as well as the similar tensions that underpin my deployment and enjoyment of it. Walking the Lea, in conscious homage to Iain Sinclair, I not only encountered the bridges one after another, but came to appreciate them – their consistencies, their peculiarities – as a result of the various entangled relationships emerging from and through the walk itself: the monotony of an A-to-B trek on the one hand and the novelty of new sites on the other; the structure of the task undertaken offset by the unforeseen contingencies that cropped up along the way; the ceaseless, bodily momentum of walking and the mental-emotional energies aroused by and through it.

If I am not entirely conscious of these tensions in situ, nor is my awareness of them necessarily post hoc. The key to enabling – and enjoying – a reflexivity along the walk, amplified to varying degrees, is the practice itself: length, route, even technique, all inform the method. Sinclair's mode, in opposition to the leisurely stroll of the flaneur, is the stalk: "purposed hiking, not dawdling, nor browsing" (1997: 75). I imagine the stalk, embark upon it, as a heads-up, steady-paced plod, slow enough to appreciate the environments one passes through but brisk

[2] It had, in fact, stopped snowing by the time I shot the film's second composition, though the bridge in question – the A121, which connects Waltham Cross train station to Waltham Abbey Church – is so low and wide that the resulting composition gives little away regarding weather.

enough to sustain interest and momentum: no stopping. Likewise, the walk must be long enough for the walker to *feel* it: achievable in one go, but something to test the feet and stiffen the hips. Only then can the recurrent features of a landscape – in this case, bridges spanning a river – reveal themselves as recurrent: each becomes a marker of distance, duration, time. To deploy these latter terms, of course, reproduces the same mechanisms of territorial conquest that historically underpin what is now commonly termed privilege. The image that best summarises such privilege is the one off-camera: me, a six-foot able-bodied white cis man, walking through a specific terrain in London – including what Sinclair calls Olympicopolis, the stretch of the Lea that encompasses the 2012 Olympics site, with its politicised and de facto racialised zones of surveillance capital – carrying the apparatus required for shooting the film free of harassment or suspicion.

At any rate, the method of the stalk democratises space insofar that it ensures the appearance of a bridge along a towpath will be followed by its disappearance, and then by the reappearance of the next bridge: memorable features of one both prompt comparisons to and are obliterated by the newness of another. The equal duration allocated to each shot in *Lea River Bridges* bears this out. Whether it is snowy or sunny, daylight or dusk, busy with people or devoid of them, each scene is given its due – as if the important thing is not so much the scenes themselves but the equal regard and consideration distributed across them. As Julie Ault (2007) has noted when describing James Benning's structural strategies: "An equivalency between scenes results in the sense that the films and their maker are non-judgemental. They archive an apparently public discourse of images, using landscape as found object" (90). This idea of ostensible non-judgement, evidenced by an equal attention given to otherwise disparate scenes varying wildly in dramatic tension – indeed, to scenes united only by the equal attention given to them – is undermined however by backstage realities: the discernment involved, for instance, in favouring one 45-second stretch of footage over another. Inversely, the very act of filming implies judgement: to document a thing is to imbue it with value.

Similarly, just as the framing of each shot in *Lea River Bridges* affirms it as an image *that has been composed*, the content of the images themselves speaks to Ault's idea of an archive of an apparently public discourse. A recurrent feature of the bridges in my film is that they lead across river to private property or fenced-off sites, which both contrasts against the public walkway from which they were filmed and reveals the subjective decision-making process that their construction constitutes: by filming a site to which one does not have access, one calls

immediate attention to one's lack of access. This tension, between an equivalence across scenes and the discernment involved in creating them in the first place, is further amplified by the contradiction between notions of "landscape as found object" and images of landscape that I would claim are as conscious and constructed as they are "inspired and constituted by a particular built space". Like the walk that informed it, *Lea River Bridges* foregrounds this tension through a persistent interplay between structure and chance. Again, it is through compositional and editorial strategies that the film simultaneously points to and away from the constructed-ness and the found-ness of its images. Briefly considering some of the challenges encountered during filming will attest to this.

While my insistence upon the same perspective allows me to emphasise variations across time and distance – the dérive as "strategic device for a kind of reconnaissance into the changing territories of the city" (Shukaitis 2014: 257) – it does draw attention to the occasions on which I had difficulty achieving the desired composition, and/or had to flout my own rules. The fifth and eleventh bridges in the film, which begin at 03:57 and 08:39 respectively, cross the Lea at diagonals – thereby upsetting the film's otherwise strict perpendicularity. The decision to be made, on both occasions, was between prioritising the horizontality of the river within frame or the centrality of the bridge to the image; either way, it was a trade-off. Similarly, for the film's thirty-second bridge (25:07), the sheer width of the viaduct – which functions at road-level as Bow Interchange – meant that adhering to plan, filming from the exact centre, would have resulted in too dark an image; I opted to shoot from one edge, looking downriver, so as to better capture the bridge-ness of the bridge. Two scenes later, at the film's thirty-fourth bridge (26:41), I positioned the camera between two more or less identical railway bridges – simply preferring the dual composition rather than repeating what might be mistaken as the same bridge twice. In all these examples, the notion of landscape as found object is both complicated and reinforced by the notion of image as construct. Even without this behind-the-scenes knowledge, the appreciable variation in composition further illustrates the film as a series of constructed images – or rather, images that had to be constructed, framed, deliberated upon.

And edited. The editorial strategies of *Lea River Bridges* also play on these notions of found and made. Although to some extent I had little control over the events unfolding at each filming location, I shot for a minimum of three minutes to accommodate a range of choices and decisions, to be made during the editing process, regarding the rhythmic properties and internal relationships of the film. To claim that a shot length of 45 seconds, once decided upon, was

applied regardless of any other shot's relative lack of narrative incident would only be partially true. Although more does happen during some shots than others in *Lea River Bridges*, decisions as to when those shots begin and end are all creative, authorial interventions: while each take in the film unfolds as if unedited, the 45-second stretch selected from the original material represents a careful editorial decision designed to calibrate the film's internal relationships, or capture a sense of its rhythms, most effectively. Like the compositional exceptions above, examples of such duration-conscious editorial decisions illustrate the simultaneity of landscape as found and made.

In durational terms, the first example to illustrate this dual notion, of a landscape as something that is found (encountered, arrived at, happened upon) and something that is made (composed, responded to, intervened upon), is the film's seventh bridge (05:30). Serving the Camden Town Brewery site across river, the overhead walkway seen in this shot is private and not found on maps. Sensing that this industrial site may boast some human presence, which had been lacking on my walk until that point, I allowed the camera to keep recording, uninterrupted, for longer than I previously had; encountering each previous bridge, I had noted that while there was enough in the soundtrack of its location to suggest some kind of human or social element, a visual human presence would provide variety in the film, thereby reflecting the diversity encountered on the walk, and would also confirm the terrain itself as having a concrete historical function in addition to any abstract aesthetic appeal. This felt, and feels, like an important guiding principle: not to photograph the bridges in such a way that they were robbed of their social use, but rather to capture them in such a way that an attention to their technical fascination also incorporated their political and historical significance (Warnke 1994: 14).

After several minutes, I became aware of footsteps overhead, of a person walking above and away from me to the other side of the river. Sure enough, a worker in a hardhat and a Hi-Viz vest appeared, descending the steps from the bridge to the footpath below, and I watched with bated breath as they walked out of sight, quite oblivious to the camera and person filming their environment. If we can think of this sequence of occurrences, however undramatic, as one action – as in a worker walks into shot, and then walks out of shot, in the same way we might regard the earlier example of the narrowboat moving through frame as a single action – it seemed important to me when it came to editing that I allow the action to play out, as it were: to complete itself by means of the worker first appearing within the frame and then exiting it. If this seems like a natural or obvious decision, to the extent that no other possibilities were even open to me, it is

perhaps due to the same narrative expectancies referred to in the previous section of this chapter. That is, a routinised understanding of narrative technique, or what one may expect from a standardised film grammar, may indeed impose an expectation on an action as isolated as the one in this scene – its dramatic value no doubt heightened by a lack of incident either side of it – to play out "in full". To stress here that I had other options, such as ending the scene just as the worker appears, or just before they exit the frame, or at some point between their appearance and disappearance, or before they even make an appearance at all, is to underline the contingencies at play. As it unfolds in the film, the completion of the action serves two functions. First, it reveals a space that extends beyond that of the visual frame, an assertion of a reality happened upon (found) that conversely reaffirms the film frame as an intervention (made). Second, the action establishes a precedent for similar moments thereafter, involving human and avian agents (joggers and cyclists, pigeons and ducks), accommodating a further range of choices at my disposal as well as the opportunity to be playful as to when in each scene an action occurs.

This latter point is key in considering some of the film's contrasts – sonic as well as graphic – and the range of interventions made to imply movement and rhythm *between* shots. If the previous example of a worker appearing in frame and then walking out of it both reveals a world that exists independent of the camera and establishes a kind of narrative expectancy for whatever other actions may occur thereafter, the film's thirty-second, thirty-third and thirty-fourth bridge compositions represent an amplification of sorts that both reflects and plays on the idea of a shifting – and busying – urban terrain. The fact that each of these shots also contravenes my compositional rules in some way compounds this idea of a shifting urban terrain: as if, as the walk begins to traverse more built-up areas, any documentation or moving-image approximation is forced out of its established rules and finds itself having to adapt accordingly. I have spoken already of such compositional exceptions; the first and third shot in question here are those already mentioned: Bow Interchange (25:07), and the two railway bridges downriver (26:41). Viewers familiar with this stretch of London may know that, to the extreme left of the second of the three compositions (25:54) is in fact the bridge from the previous composition, Bow Interchange; the bridge that is the focus of this second composition is another private walkway, which leads to the site of real estate firm Vastint UK Services.

When walking this route, having begun it at Waltham Abbey, one is not unaware of the ambient change in terrain. London seems to impress itself upon the walker at this point in that way cities do, by accelerating what had been, one suddenly realises, an exponential, almost

gravitational pull; it is no coincidence that an upsurge in recordable action, an increase in occurrences to document, takes place beneath or near to a notoriously busy grade-separated junction. When it came to editing, I figured that if the first of these three compositions, captured beneath Bow Interchange, suggests a shift in terrain due to the exceptional width of the viaduct in the image – connoting a busy interchange, for example, as opposed to earlier footbridges through quieter post-industrial edgelands – I might also be able to draw upon as well as reflect the plethora of options at my disposal in deciding which 45-second stretch to insert into the film. Due to the width of Bow Interchange, and my subsequent need to revise or flout my own compositional rules in filming beneath it, the scene is also unique in that it captures human movement through the z-axis rather than the x-axis: as seen in figure 2, a cyclist, silhouetted in the far background towards the right of frame, disappears out of shot but continues to travel towards and behind the camera offscreen. Viewers who spot the cyclist and note the angle at which the river is framed may come to expect the corresponding sonic occurrence; that the cyclist whistles following their visual disappearance but before the sonic crescendo of their bike, which only denotes their eventual though offscreen proximity to the camera, confirms the contingencies that underpin such an action.

***Figure 2. Beneath Bow Interchange in* Lea River Bridges**

If the exceptional qualities of this shot, as I have suggested, imply a shift in territory – from the edgelands upriver to something resembling the city proper – the scene that follows only builds on this implied shift. Although this second shot also includes, as mentioned, Bow Interchange to the far-left of frame, I chose a 45-second stretch of footage that begins in sonic contrast to the previous shot, a relatively quiet scene – quiet enough that an overhead plane can be heard – so that the growing sound of a police siren is emphasised across the scene's second half. While I had no control over whether or not a police car drove over the Bow Interchange during the several minutes I chose to record this shot, recording for several minutes embodied in itself a choice, and it also afforded another: to end the scene just as the siren is at its loudest. Unlike the previous examples, of a worker exiting a frame or a cyclist travelling through the scene of action off-camera, this scene ends mid-action – before, as it were, the action can unfold "in full" or "to completion". In addition, just as a worker exiting the frame points to a world that exists beyond it, so the mid-action cut-to-black suggests a world that continues after recording has stopped. Indeed, the particular qualities of a siren, necessarily grating as they are, and the increasing volume/proximity of the one heard in this scene, makes the cut-to-black seem all the more abrupt – and may therefore reify, for the viewer, the found/made dynamic. The scene, then, was simultaneously happened upon (I set up my camera and recorded for several minutes with minimal means of directing or governing what unfolded) and intervened upon (I specified which 45-second stretch of footage made it into the final film). This interplay is further underlined by the next shot, of the two bridges downriver, which begins *in media res*: a kind of associative continuation of the police siren and also a textural departure in that the sound, in this instance a diminuendo rather than a crescendo, is of an overhead train. Again, beginning the shot mid-action was a decision enabled by filming conditions: contingency on the one hand accommodated by structure on the other. Beginning mid-action also, of course, suggests that a scene exists prior to and regardless of the recording device capturing it.

I will return to how such sequential arrangements might capture the rhythmic properties of a walk down the River Lea, as well as to my decision to end each scene with an interval of silent black screen, in the next section of this chapter. At this point, however, in summary, I contend that the above observations suggest a film practice that makes a point if not virtue of its own contingency: nodding to a sense of authored construction at the same time as it undermines traditional notions of authorship. Put another way, mine is a practice that exists in and of a world that simultaneously is brought to life by and unfolds regardless of – and largely indifferent to –

this mode of production. It is on these terms that *Lea River Bridges* contributes to the structural film as – to repeat an earlier remark – a playful riff upon the engrained viewing practices associated with and required of narrative cinema. A consideration of how this playful dynamic, between the found and the made, finds expression in both compositional and durational terms, is perhaps best served by a brief discussion of the film's opening shot. The view of Waltham Abbey, captured from a roundabout on the London-Essex border, constitutes in some ways the film's busiest scene – unsurprisingly, given its location and how much activity unfolds at road-level in a city in comparison to a footpath running alongside a minor river flowing through it. In compositional terms, like the above examples, this shot has both a found-ness and a constructed-ness embedded within it. Setting up my tripod and searching for the desired frame, I already knew this film was to consist of fixed-frame images composed in direct response to the architectural logic of the River Lea's bridges, and had therefore intuited that it would in both abstract and explicit ways be exploring ontological questions about what André Bazin (1967) called "the instrumentality of the non-living agent" (13). The film would be exploring, in other words, the tension between the imaginative processes by which an onscreen reality is shaped and the self-acting mechanical automatism with which a camera records it (Rodowick 2007: 47).

Hoping to articulate and prime such questions in the film's opening shot, I centred the view upon Waltham Abbey, which stood about 200 yards away from me, and tilted the camera very slightly upwards and zoomed it in enough – and *just* enough – that only the roofs of cars were visible in the bottom foreground of the frame; anything taller, such as a public bus or an HGV, might subsequently take on greater significance. This greater significance, however, works paradoxically: having been zoomed in, the camera captures such vehicles in such a way that their presence in the frame – their movement through it – is emphasised through abstraction, so that the fixed view of the abbey might conversely acquire a greater intensity, or specificity, as an immobile structure amidst flux. With no further context given, the terms on which a viewer is meant to receive, read or interpret this image not only remain ambiguous; the composition itself also instantiates ambiguity – a vantage point of apparent ambivalence, which will persist throughout the film. If this apparent ambivalence reaffirms Sitney's remark on the structural film, that "what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline" (2002: 348), it might also be seen as a challenge to or departure from a mode of documentary that insists upon context within the film itself. Viewed as such, the master shots in *Lea River Bridges* are not unlike the uninterrupted, fixed-frame takes deployed in Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), which exemplify

an ambiguity that, in the context of a narrative fiction, grow to be unsettling and disturbing due to the film's sustained mystification as to whose vantage point they represent. While his film works within and against nationally and historically specific arthouse tropes, Haneke's exploration of ontological questions around the camera as both instrument and *instrumental*, deploys a documentary strategy to bring its traditional functions into question. As Jeff Menne and Nicole Seymour (2009) claim, exploring such ontological questions in this way critiques and "exposes the human insistence on narrativity and, thus, meaning".

Likewise, from its opening shot, *Lea River Bridges* poses a challenge to any would-be insistence on narrativity: what indeed might it mean to have filmed this scene, and what indeed might it mean to present it as a kind of prologue to the subsequent sequence of bridges? As Felicity Colman (2018) remarks of a common feature in James Benning's work, "no instructional, deterministic or perceptual models for reading are provided; the images simply articulate what unfolds in front of the camera, with no discernible intervention to shape a drama or a story out of the sound-images" (115). In considering these questions, we arrive again at the found/made dynamic and how it underpins the playful simultaneity of the structural film, which both promotes and destabilises traditional notions of authorship. At several minutes long, the original take of the film's opening shot, recorded on a Friday morning, reveals an almost-constant flow of road traffic through and within the frame that contrasts with the fixed viewpoint of the abbey itself. This sense of almost-constant visual flow is reinforced by the ceaseless sound of passing traffic and, more notably, wind, which batters the external mic attached to the camera. Although at later points the film refers to a similarly unceasing busyness through sound – captured from the underbelly of the M25 (01:36), for instance, or a reggae song whose duration is longer than the 45 seconds of footage that made it into the film (14:55), or via the relentless chug of an offscreen generator (18:51) – this opening scene involved an unending audiovisual flow that precluded any single action to emerge as a guiding editorial principle. In other words, whichever 45-second stretch of footage I opted for, the scene would inevitably begin and end mid-action.

The result is an unexpectedly eventful start – *in media res* – whose very eventfulness is stressed by an absence of contextual information or visual cues as to how the scene is meant to be read. As a statement of intent, the opening shot both encapsulates and nods onward to the film's fundamental exploration of the ways a found environment resists and lends itself to an authored image. The way in which the title card interrupts this scene, combined with the title itself, may

further point to the film's strategic deployment of playful contrasts: if the uninspiring, uncreative title of the film jars against its appearance in the film – in the form of a declarative flash-cut – it also contrasts with the preceding view of Waltham Abbey, which of course contains no bridges and no River Lea. Likewise, the single credit that ends and dates the film, which appears via a flash-cut between the penultimate and final shots, speaks to a low-key playful assertiveness that riffs off the found/made dynamic that has emerged hitherto: the "MICHAEL PATTISON / 2017" intertitle at the end of the film cheekily suggests these scenes were nothing but constructed, the work of a named author, while providing no further information about the conditions of their construction. That this intertitle is followed by a master shot of the Thames, with London's more familiar skyline visible upriver, further implies a world that unfolds independent of and indifferent to the camera and the person operating it – thereby revealing the bold intertitle, with its garish orange font, to be simultaneously serious and tongue-in-cheek.

Finally, two further examples – behind the scenes so to speak – underline how the tension between a found landscape and a constructed image emerges dually from the compositional and editorial decisions that went into the creation of each shot in *Lea River Bridges*. The first is an outtake, never to be seen, from the film's fourteenth bridge: an otherwise undramatic scene, much like the one included in the final cut (11:00), marred by a cyclist racing through a puddle in which one of the tripod legs sat, close enough for the camera to be momentarily disturbed and for me to be splashed. I cursed: audibly. Though editing out my verbal outcry would have been a simple enough trick, the slight but appreciable jolt of the camera was less fixable. At any rate, the outtake served as a kind of existential paradox: the error as evidence of endeavour, what Volker Patenburg (2007) terms "contingency as a guaranteed proof of reality" (188). The second example made it into the film. The twenty-fifth bridge composition – with the narrowboat passing through frame, the one from which I arrived at a standard shot length of 45 seconds – contains action over which I had, on the one hand, no control: the coinciding spectacle of a train passing overhead through the z-axis, and of students and the narrowboat passing in different directions through the x-axis, would have taken place regardless of my presence that day. On the other hand, a specific element of the action could not have happened without me. My presence *did* intervene upon the scene: it is the tripod-fixed camera itself, and me standing behind it, which causes the driver of the narrowboat to break the fourth wall, before looking up at the belly of the bridge above them, as if to ask what could possibly be of interest to a cameraperson along this towpath.

At first, this gesture, of the narrowboat driver inadvertently breaking the fourth wall, was unwelcome: a potentially jarring moment, I thought, for an audience watching the film. But jarring why? If the fourth wall was an illusory device, a dramatic convention akin to the two-way mirror, with actors on one side and the audience on the other, what kind of narrative expectancy was being dismantled by a narrowboat driver acknowledging the camera and/or my presence behind it? Again, like the earlier outtake that failed to make the cut, this moment functions paradoxically: rather than collapse the film's established codes of spectatorship, its division between a staged choreography and the digestion of such information by an audience, it reinforces the tensions undergirding such spectatorship. This specific scene in *Lea River Bridges* condenses the film's structural dynamics as a whole: a work whose presentation of landscape as a found object is itself nothing if not staged. The seeming ambivalence declared by the structural film towards its subject matter – the content of its images – is revealed as a charade. Everything is of interest; or rather, it ought to be.

1.3 Rhythms: Sequential and Concurrent

When Regina Cornwell (1979) describes the structural film as "a highly intellectual experience at the same time that it is perceptual and sensuous" (90), she points less to the internal relationships of the film than to the relationship between spectator and the work itself. The question is: highly intellectual for whom? As we have seen, in centralising, even thematising, the mechanical functions of the cinema apparatus, structural films are predicated upon an assumed understanding – to varying degrees – of those functions, and upon an understanding of how those functions are ordinarily deployed in narrative cinema. Ostensibly, this narrows the audience, and the present conversation, to an avant-garde practice of niche appeal. To be perceptual and sensuous, however, structural films must also attempt to satisfy an aesthetic understanding before and beyond any intellectual experience. In my own practice, this tension between the sensuous and intellectual takes the form of a vague aspiration: to be interesting or unusual before one considers *why* it is interesting or unusual. One does not necessarily need to study, much less understand, what Sitney calls the "primal shape" of a film for that primal shape to be the film's lasting impression. Peter Gidal (1978) arrives at this crux when describing the crucial basis of structural film as the relationship "between what the camera is aimed at and the way that 'image' is presented" (1). The central tension, for Gidal, is between the film as a *presentation* of images and the attempt to decipher the *production* of those images:

> The mental activation of the viewer is necessary for the procedure of the film's existence. Each film is not only structural but also structuring. This is extremely important as each moment of film reality is not an atomistic, separate entity but rather a moment in a relativistic generative system in which one can't *simply* break down the experience into elements. The viewer is forming an equal and possibly more or less opposite "film" in her/his head, constantly anticipating, correcting, re-correcting – constantly intervening in the arena of confrontation with the given reality, i.e. the isolated chosen area of each film's work, of each film's production. (3; emphasis in original)

It is in this way that the structural film's mechanics begin to resemble those of the walk, insofar that one does not need to know why one is walking in order to glean enjoyment and purpose from it. Walking can also claim to be, in very basic terms, perceptual and sensuous, long before it might be considered a highly intellectual exercise or experience. Likewise, as in the structural film, relationships between rhythm and expectancy, stillness and movement, structure and chance, cannot be understood in isolation; again, it is through the sensory experience of the walk itself that these relationships are gradually revealed. Due to the sequential nature of walking – the involuntary mechanisms, the one-foot-after-another muscle memory of bipedalism – the walker also forms another "walk" in their head: anticipating and recounting (bridges ahead versus bridges encountered), correcting and re-correcting (one bridge recalls another bridge only as it reconfigures the latter in one's memory). The walk is not only structural; it is also structuring.

Yi Chen (2013) suggests a correlation between the "rhythmic flow" of walking, "with which not much consciousness is required to perform much mundane operation" (532), and a potential in the structural film "to sensitise [viewers] to a different angle of perceiving such a mundane practice" (535). Chen analyses William Raban's *Fergus Walking* (1978), in which an otherwise pedestrian scene of a man walking down a street is rendered perceptually disorientating due to a number of technical interventions: as the man walks down this unremarkable street, objects he passes reappear in front of him. Chen remarks: "The effort in making sense of the rhythmic interplay in the film relies on our memory, anticipation and imagination" (536). In *Lea River Bridges*, the relationship between memory, anticipation and imagination is itself intended as a rhythmic interplay; challenged, disrupted, made conscious by the specific editorial pattern of having one 45-second shot follow another. Several viewers, after watching the film, have questioned the shot length, assuming some scenes do last longer – sometimes a lot longer – than others. Other viewers have asked, after the film, why I chose to include one of the bridges twice, having misremembered subtle variations in two different bridges appearing at different points in

the film and subsequently attempting to convince me that such a repetition does indeed occur. If the first of these examples reveals the ways in which incident and action (or a lack of these) affect our sensory experience of duration and therefore of urban space, the second points to the surprising and often amusing way in which both a city walk and a structural film can structure, activate, challenge, inform or deceive what Chen calls our "perceptual architecture" (538).

In the case of that undertaken for *Lea River Bridges*, the walk structured a sensory understanding of London and its geography. Here, one draws upon personal instinct – and deploys ineluctable prejudice – to remain alert to the subtleties of and changes in footfall, sonic footprint, the widths of the footpath underneath and bridges overhead, the functions of the architectures encountered, the intuitive calculations that record how green a space is, or indeed how grey. In this sense, the prescribed route, in its straight-line, A-to-B conception, is also *constituent of* space, and of spaces (Smith 2010: 113): not merely "a strategic device for a kind of reconnaissance into the changing territories of the city" (Shukaitis 2014: 257), but something that is itself understood in spatial and sensorial terms. Such an understanding is, in short, rhythmic. Just as the sequential nature of the route undertaken impresses itself upon the walker through repetition and variation, one's ongoing, negotiational grasp of the city is informed by a multitude of concurrent rhythms: mechanical, organic and often, were one inclined to study them, measurable (Lefebvre 2004: 7).

When I first walked the Lea, I brought to it a vague but useful knowledge, firstly of the sites I should expect to encounter en route and secondly where, generally speaking, these sites are located in relation to the urban centre and also to my destination at Limehouse Basin: Thames. This knowledge was vague insofar as it was remembered: no maps. But it was useful in that it provided a structural logic, a narrative expectancy not unlike that outlined earlier, by which one maintains an intuitive log of distance – that travelled, and that to come – as well as rhythm. Happening upon a busy bridge that is likely the M25, for instance, one makes a mental note of the first obvious milestone on the walk; make it to what must be Limehouse Cut and one has entered the walk's final stretch. Such judgements also lend a kind of twofold suspense, in the general anticipatory sense of when and where one might meet certain milestones and in more culturally informed ways, which take the form of a subset of questions that are never not being asked: *Is this stretch of the walk dangerous? What might a term like dangerous mean in this context? What kind of expectations are defining this experience? Where is the nearest bus or Tube station to where I am now? Am I as far into the walk as I think I am? Will I reach the*

Thames before nightfall? To reiterate an earlier point, these latter questions – and their answers – vary according to who the walker is, their visible characteristics and what assumptions might be made of them, the extent to which they could be othered; and also to more elemental variables, defined by cyclical rhythms, such as weather and season. Similarly, *Lea River Bridges* also structures a spatial and sensory – which is to say rhythmic – understanding of a city. This structuring presupposes narrative expectancies, shared assumptions. It is not that any single shot, or sequence of shots, must be read a certain way; it is that the structural properties of the film, just like the structural properties of the walk, provide a framework for capturing, imagining and reflecting upon the city and all its multiplicities. As a very simple example, consider again the film's thirty-third bridge (25:54): just as one may have, upon hearing the siren while passing under this bridge, imagined or speculated about an emergency unfolding somewhere nearby, the sound may also, as presented in the film's diegesis, suggest a drama unfolding out of shot – a drama possibly belonging to a film very different to this one. In its simultaneous presence and absence – it is audible, but its source is unseen – the siren connects the walker-viewer to a multitude of spatial possibilities elsewhere. In short, the scene structures: it provides a framework for capturing, imagining, reflecting upon the city.

We return, then, to Jonathan Perel's structural strategies. Though *Lea River Bridges* may not be confronting national and political traumas in the same way or to the same degree as *Toponymy* – if indeed the film can be read this way at all – its structural strategies make conscious the mode of engagement: viewing becomes a kind of labour, and capturing, imagining and reflecting upon the city become creative acts. I have written earlier in this chapter about the editorial and compositional decisions that highlight the tension in *Lea River Bridges* between a found landscape and a constructed image; in this final section, a brief discussion of how narrative expectancies might be structurally embedded into a walk, and then of how some other editorial decisions were made in order to approximate such expectancies, will further illustrate some of the ways in which *Lea River Bridges* structures a rhythmic understanding of London. Such examples reveal how my attempt to minimise the variables within my control – the length and composition of each shot – accommodates an emphasis upon the variations encountered by the city-walker across distance and experienced by the film-viewer over duration. The structural properties of my film are thus proposed as particularly suited to capturing the structural properties of my walk, revealing how each enacts and embodies a spatial practice.

To walk the stretch of the Lea in the way that I did, starting at Waltham Abbey, one needs to have made one's way to it. In my case, this entailed navigating various modes of transit from my accommodation in Stamford Hill, Inner London, to Waltham Cross, Essex. This initial journey, a prologue to the thing itself, placed me at the mercy of published rhythms: Transport for London's bus and train timetables, the opening times of a greasy spoon in Waltham Cross (a good walk, I contend, begins with a hearty breakfast). Negotiating such rhythms, over a specific time and distance, was enough for the Lea to make itself known as somewhere between a peripheral location and an urban centre. A cursory glance at the map ahead of the walk further affirms this interstitial quality. One sees, and can thus anticipate, the defining features of the river-route between Waltham Abbey and the Thames: M25, King George's Reservoir, Walthamstow Wetlands, Hackney Marshes, Olympic Park, Bow Interchange, Limehouse Cut. Even when such features are not immediately visible from the towpath during the walk per se, such as King George's Reservoir, or William Girling Reservoir just south of it, advance knowledge of them conditions a narrative expectancy: one might reason in advance that this is likely a comparatively quiet stretch of the walk, or rather one defined by a slower or less frenzied/mechanic rhythm (and, as it turns out, it is). Likewise, more distant sites, nevertheless visible along the route, assist one's orientation as markers of distance and territory in their own right: the sudden appearance of the HSBC Tower in Canary Wharf to the east, for instance, concurs with the more audibly concentrated rhythms of city traffic, which helps situate one's present location as near to or nearing the Thames. The walk involves and articulates a bell-curve in activity, a bell-curve in the intensity of rhythms, not only due to its geographical meander – the way the river and the towpath snake through a terrain that is in turn defined by, or adjacent to, business and warehouse infrastructures, marshlands, residential neighbourhoods, commuter roads, a major stadium, college buildings, more gentrified quarters, small docklands – but also due to the duration and timing of the 18-mile trudge, extending into the afternoon and towards the winter evening rush hour.

Viewed in this context, *Lea River Bridges* structures an image of and reflection on the city that is both abstract and specific in its rhythms. It is abstract insofar that, through its formal techniques, it captures a general impression of both the terrain encountered and how a single walk through this terrain might unfold. Certain ambiences, sounds and textures seem guaranteed: the ceaseless throb of a motorway, the intermittent roar of an overhead train, the fluctuating bustle of an industrial site. The film is also specific, however, insofar that it captures

irreproducible occurrences, whose concurrence could have only taken place at specific points in space and time: the gradual crescendo of a police siren, the timing of a cyclist's whistle, the breaking of the fourth wall by someone driving a narrowboat through the visual frame of someone else's tripod-fixed camera. As we have seen, and as these examples reiterate, the landscapes encountered during the walk are *found* to the same degree as the images captured during it are *made*: each of these propositions contains within it the simultaneity, in rhythmic terms, of the abstract and the specific, the general and the contingent, the verifiable and the intuitive. In other words, *Lea River Bridges* documents a city in its assumed state on the one hand and in much more definable and concrete ways on the other: a document of the River Lea between 10am and 5pm on Friday 20 January 2017 would likely repeat the workflows, timetables and cyclical patterns of the same area between 10am and 5pm on Friday 13 January 2017, but it would also have included aberrations, departures, unique occurrences, just as it would have likely differed from a document of the River Lea between the same hours on, say, any given Sunday. Viewed in such terms, the film negotiates a tension between the apparently public discourse of images, and therefore rhythms, that Ault (2007) describes in James Benning's work and something that is absolutely conditional upon the subjective experience of the walker-worker-viewer-maker. (Our reading of a city is of course dependent upon the ways in which certain spaces, seasons and times of day inform one another; edgelands, marshlands and urban centres have very different rhythms and therefore are experienced very differently according to when in the day, and year, one encounters them. This is also where the more moderate aspects of the film-walk come into play; if, for instance, I had chosen to walk and film the Lea on a day of torrential rain, the film would likely have lost its sense of abstraction, would have likely become a more specifically focused vision of English weather at its most miserable. Again, we cannot merely assume the generality of an image, for generality is itself contingent upon a set of particulars – in this case weather and lighting conditions agreeable for walking and, yes, filming.)

These observations are significant when considering some of the editorial choices behind *Lea River Bridges* because they highlight the specific ways in which the film might approximate a general impression, an experiential understanding, of the city in rhythmic terms – and how this approximation plays with embedded narrative expectancies. As with the compositional and durational decisions discussed in the previous section of this chapter, capturing the aggregate effect of the walk in rhythmic terms became a matter of intuition. What one viewer, following its premiere at East End Film Festival, called the film's "sense of journey" emerged during filming

and was further calibrated during editing. In simple terms, this process entailed consciously opting for more incident-light 45-second stretches for the film's earlier scenes and consciously opting for more incident-heavy 45-second stretches for the film's middle section, before allowing the overall sense of incident to peter out again in later scenes. It is as easy to overstate the level of intervention here as it is the level to which the editing was predetermined. Mostly, the raw material itself reflected fluctuations in rhythm, with some bridges naturally giving more editorial options than others due to concurrences in action and the particular intensity of their rhythm. Either way, the aim was to capture and reflect the gradual escalation in intensity, followed by a de-escalation, of the city's polyrhythms: the bell-curve of action encountered across that Friday in January 2017.

A consideration of some shots in sequence is helpful here. As we saw in the previous section, the opening scene in *Lea River Bridges*, a view of Waltham Abbey, provides a flow of visual activity so constant that the scene begins and ends as if mid-action. To describe the scene's flow of visual activity as constant, in fact, is something of a truism: in asserting the ineluctability and persistence of the visual, for instance, would such a description not apply to any moving-image work? It may be better, then, to describe and compare the film's scenes in terms of how intensified their action, or rhythm, is; and to describe the film's opening scene, on this basis, in terms of its simultaneity and multiplicity, both of which are reflected and enhanced by its sound, which is similarly ineluctable and persistent in its oscillations, repetitions, and rhythms. Kevin Hetherington (2013) understands rhythm as both a cause and assertion of a city's multiplicity, emerging from an urban noise that is simultaneously free of pattern and an iteration of patterns (25). This formal contradiction, to be without pattern on the one hand and to find form through patterns on the other, is the basis upon which a sense of place is both understood and never settled: familiar and unfamiliar, stable and contingent, structured and structuring. As such, the film's opening scene, with its relatively intensified polyrhythms, doubles as a kind of snapshot of the themes that will emerge throughout. In contrast to this opening scene, the film's first bridge (00:49), shot beneath the very road on which the preceding scene was captured, is much less intense in its multiplicity of action/noise. Subsequently, the scene could almost be read as a wry (or bad) joke: a pre-warning that the film will test viewers' patience (MacDonald 2007: 227). The film's second bridge (01:36) extends the general composition and sonic ambience – that distorted hum of overhead traffic – from the first bridge. In doing so, the latter scene establishes the film's first compositional repetition in the same moment it introduces its first variation: this is *yet*

another bridge, on the one hand, which calls attention to the fact it is *not the same bridge* on the other hand. As Lefebvre (2004) phrases it, in the equation A = A, the second A is different to the first by virtue of being second (7): the essence of a sequence lies in the difference between its units. No coincidence, perhaps, that this present discussion takes its meaning from a course of water: as the idiom goes, one cannot enter the same river twice. (We will return to such propositions in the following chapter, when discussing *Lubiana Laibach* in the context of repetition and difference.)

The important point here is that, while the pre-existing architectural logic of the first bridge in *Lea River Bridges* prohibited much in the way of my own intervention, the pre-existing architectural logic of the second bridge permitted much in the way of intervention. While the former bridge is encountered at a point where the river is narrow, and the bridge itself is low and wide to the point of precluding a vantage point from which to orientate one's perspective, the latter bridge – the M25 – is high enough, and encountered at a point where the river is relatively much wider, that the resulting composition contains a great deal more to be looked at as well as listened to. Scene by scene, bridge by bridge, the viewer encounters the same oscillations in rhythmic intensity as the walker – even while the distinct qualities of such rhythms would necessarily differ from one walk to the next. Accordingly, while I might have continued filming the first bridge for hours without any occurrence of note, and without any change to the textural properties of the image – indeed, without any intensification in rhythm – the second bridge presented, within seconds of filming, the kind of contingencies and multiplicities to which I have just referred. As in the previous section, my point here is to note the wider range of editorial options opened up by the busier scene, declared by the unprecedented visual features and concomitant intensification in sound suggested by an increase in such action. One image of little more than a stone wall is followed by another image that includes graffiti, perspectival depth, pylons, pillars, moving vehicles.

This last feature is key in considering rhythm: while graffiti, perspectival depth, pylons and pillars are all fixed features, the appearance of a red lorry proceeding left-to-right through frame introduces an element of movement that, in this and the preceding image, was only implied through sound (the flow of water in both shots notwithstanding). The red lorry's appearance also functions, for me, as a way of introducing suspense to the film's narrative expectancy – enhanced and fulfilled, in the final moments of the scene, by the right-to-left procession of a black car. Though it may be some time before we see such action as this again in the film, the very

inclusion of such movement imbues each moment hereafter with the possibility of action, and therefore the possibility of rhythm: action as simultaneously iterative of and free from pattern. If we can say the consistent duration allocated to each bridge implies a fixity (the walker-viewer will remain at each bridge for the same length of time regardless of what they encounter there), we might also say that the possibility of action governed by the location of each bridge acquires its own rhythm (the suspense, the anticipation, of the unexpected).

To reconfigure an earlier point, the key tension here is less between stillness and movement than sequential rhythms and concurrent rhythms: a journey through geographical terrain captured and presented as a series of fixed-frame images as well as a document of distinct territories, each with its own character. Compounding this duality is my decision to separate each 45-second shot with two seconds of silent black screen, which interrupts the flow of images with a recurrent absence of image. I had conceived of this device prior to filming, and also intuited the two-second duration as a kind of optimum length with which to both suggest a relationship between scenes and to allow each scene to exist on its own terms – affording the viewer what Jim Jarmusch describes, in an interview with Peter von Bagh and Mika Kaurismäki (2011), as "a moment to think, to digest the scene they have just been watching, even if it is so simple that it doesn't have to be digested intellectually" (76). Indeed, if these intervals are disruptive and/or apparently counterintuitive, adding what Guy Austin (2015) has elsewhere described as "a moment of blockage" (162) to a depiction of something as spatially fluid as a walk, they also imbue the film with its own rhythm, establishing a narrative expectancy that allows for additional playfulness and moments of surprise. Multiple viewers have remarked upon the rhythmic quality of these cuts, the way they impose a mechanical punchiness upon an otherwise organic stream of material, or else the way they seem to simultaneously stop dead each scene while advancing the film and its journey forward. One viewer has remarked how, as the film developed and they adapted to its rhythms, they came to want the black-screen intervals to be longer, to allow for more time to reflect upon the preceding shot (and perhaps to prepare for the next). Another viewer has noted that the timing of the hard cuts is relieving or frustrating depending on how absorbing the scene preceding it is. Film critic Julien Allen (personal communication, 2017) writes: "Although I think most people would have latched these images together with dissolves/overlapping sound, the decision to go with black means the film is clearly making a statement that your reverie is not continuous, you're not in a dream, you're seeing pieces and each little fragment of the story is its own story."

Figure 3. Sequential and concurrent rhythms in **Lea River Bridges**

The cuts-to-black, here, are an authorial device: a stark and repeated reminder that these found images are made, staged, intervened upon. They also further underline my earlier point regarding the film's general eschewal of context: each serves as a playful interruption to narrative continuity and also, therefore, as a challenge to understanding the source and meaning of the

rhythms captured. As such, just as the city is opened up to and by the walker-viewer, it also remains unlocked, untapped, mysterious. The black-screen intervals enhance such mystery by denying the city and its rhythms both an origin and an end. Each scene in *Lea River Bridges* culminates in nothingness, which is itself suggestive of a continuation that is confirmed only by another iteration in the sequence. As Dick Hebdige (2007) has remarked of James Benning's *13 LAKES* (2004), in which fixed-frame single-take perspectives of America's Great Lakes are interrupted by intervals of black leader, "the paratactic design of the film has it beginning over and over again" (135). In the same way that Hebdige describes the lakes in Benning's film, each scene in *Lea River Bridges* is "bereft of reference to an inaugural event" (ibid), with the black screen that precedes and concludes each tableau affirming a kind of "continual recommencement": the city is as fathomable, measurable and experienceable as it is ultimately emergent *ex nihilo*. Volker Patenburg (2007) has described the black-screen intervals in Benning's work – including *13 LAKES*, but also *TEN SKIES* (2004), *El Valley Centro* (1999), *Los* (2000) and *Sogobi* (2001) – as "not nothing" (190), embodying as they do "the distance covered between locations…. thousands of kilometres, the hefty motor noise of Benning's car, the highways and country roads, the dirt roads leading to the various lakes – preserved in a locked and light-tight container" (ibid). Indeed, just as perspective conditions an awareness of spatial depth that stretches to an imagined infinity (White 2010: 366-7), the black-screen intervals in *Lea River Bridges* evoke an infinite cycle of concurrent rhythms by imposing a finiteness, disrupting and renewing the sequence with their own mechanical rhythm.

A city can be understood, then, as well as never understood, in rhythmic terms. Put another way, a city is experienced in ways that are unpredictable and contingent on the one hand and suggestive of repetitions and patterns in movement on the other. The tenth bridge in *Lea River Bridges* (07:52) provides a good example. This scene, like that shot under the M25, affords a relatively wide vantage point, of the EcoPark site across river. While the walk itself conditions a narrative expectancy, where the walker may come to reasonably anticipate some intensification in rhythm at such a site, the viewer's own expectations may be informed by the scene's resemblance to previous scenes and what occurred at those scenes. Three bridges prior to this view of EcoPark, for instance, is the Camden Town Brewery site discussed earlier, in which a worker in hard hat and Hi-Viz appears in the frame before walking out of it. Sure enough, at this tenth bridge, a delivery truck exits a depot at the EcoPark site, moving right-to-left through (and out of) frame, just as a cyclist appears and moves left-to-right through (and out of) frame. This is,

as illustrated in figure 3, an escalation and intensification of the kind of action that unfolds in the film's second bridge, under the M25. Whereas the action of a red lorry moving through the frame in one direction followed by a black car moving through the frame in the opposite direction is sequential, the action of a delivery truck moving through frame in one direction at the same time at which a cyclist moves through the frame in another direction is concurrent.

In both these examples, it is the fixed perspective of the camera as well as the fixed duration of the take that allows for the rhythmic properties of the city, its multiplicities, to be asserted and emphasised (this is extended further, as we shall see, in the extended superimpositions of *Lubiana Laibach*, in which actions unfolding in different places and at different times merge in the same frame). Patterns emerge at the same time at which a comprehensive understanding of patterns is denied: the city is revealed as unpredictable and contingent, full of seemingly improbable coincidences, as well as predictable and familiar, defined by nothing if not the everyday. Chance, indeed, has its own rhythm. It is in this sense that the structural qualities of *Lea River Bridges* are particularly suited to capturing the rhythmic experience of urban space and of walking as a spatial practice. The formal parameters I adopted in making the film allow for an approximation of that rhythmic experience and spatial practice that is at once a document of place and a stylisation of it: a document insofar that it captures what happened and a stylisation insofar that it suggests incident as conditional upon and conditioned by authorial intervention. Any sense of inevitability that comes with the encroachment of dusk, for instance, as seen in the thirty-seventh (29:02) and thirty-eighth (29:49) bridges, is offset and enlivened by variations in the sequence and the unpredictability of action: consider the visually unique thirty-ninth bridge (30:36) as one final variation in the sequence, and the sudden sound of five bells emanating from the off-screen St Anne's Church at the forty-second bridge (42:58) as an occurrence as anticipatable in reality as it is unexpected in the film. A claim of authorship-cum-ownership – "MICHAEL PATTISON / 2017" – is followed by a scene of a river utterly resistant to such ownership.

In *Lea River Bridges*, as in the walk to which it responds, rhythm is experienced as both sequential and concurrent, emerging from the multiplicity and simultaneity of action, and reflected in and exacerbated by an image-by-image and scene-to-scene construct. As discussed, the narrative expectancy conditioned by the film's formal structure both reflects and exploits everyday understandings of the city in rhythmic terms. As we have seen throughout this chapter, it is through a presiding, and even predetermined, attention to structure that a filmic response to

urban space can in turn structure that response – just as a presiding and predetermined attention to the structure of an urban walk in turn structures one's understanding of that urban space. The significance of this chapter is its focus upon and illustration of the ways in which a destination-oriented dérive can be understood as structural: as predicated upon narrative expectancy, upon the repeated features and logic of a particular built environment as both found and made, and upon rhythm as sequential and concurrent. Each of these concepts reveals itself not in isolation, but relationally, due to the complex ways in which urban space is encountered, expressed, lived. Such ways are measurable, recordable, designable and devisable. And the city, always and irrepressibly, finds ways to challenge them. The film's significance, in fact, is its tension between knowable micro-narratives and elusive macro-narratives: the city in its totality finds expression here in snippets and snapshots, 45 seconds at a time.

Chapter 2. Sit Down, Sit Still: Stasis, Slowness and Simultaneity in *Lubiana Laibach*

> Is it playing?
>
> — A spectator, one minute in, watching *Lubiana Laibach*

In the equation A = A, Henri Lefebvre (2004) contends, the second A is different to the first by virtue of it being second (7). To encounter repetition, to experience it *as* repetition, is to recall the earlier instance: the first occurrence of the unit that is now being repeated. Drawing as it does upon such recall, repetition is consequently experienced relationally: the repeated event is understood *as* a repeat only in relation to that which it is repeating. As such, once revealed as something that is repeated, the first event also takes retroactive meaning from the same fact: to recall it is to colour it, revise it, imbue it with newly perceived qualities. Even if one were to return to and re-encounter the first A – by rewinding a tape, for instance, or by a digital equivalent – the encounter itself would now be influenced by a knowledge of the second A. Thus, repetition induces not merely difference but an awareness of difference: the very process by which the repetition is understood necessitates a reflexivity that attunes one's perceptual apparatus to variation. As Eirini Kartsaki and Theron Schmidt (2015) have remarked, "the only possible repetition is the repetition of impossibility" (1). Games built around a perception of difference often play on this tension. Consider, for example, the newspaper puzzle in which an image is reproduced for readers to identify aberrations between what is presented and accepted as the original picture and a doctored version alongside it: to spot the difference is to note the manipulations that make the two ostensibly identical images distinct.

While this example is relational, prompting as it does a side-by-side comparison, it also engenders simultaneity, affording and relying on an almost instantaneous means of considering two images in the same field of vision.[1] My interest in Lefebvre's proposition, however, is also due to its especial relevance to repetitions encountered across spaced intervals and over time, and to the sequential and durational nature of my walking and filmmaking practices. Viewed in sequence, the eponymous features of *Lea River Bridges* are permutational: the film's compositional repetitions draw attention to the ways in which one bridge varies from each of the

[1] For a more scientific and neuropsychological discussion of relational memory and non-relational memory, see O'Keefe and Nadel (1978), Yonelinas (2002), Rugg and Curran (2007), and Soei, Bellebaum and Daum (2009).

ones preceding and succeeding it – what Mark Cousins (2004) calls, in conceptualising the formal and narrative innovations of film since its origins, "schema plus variation" (12-3). As a film like *Lea River Bridges* makes clear, repetition is at the heart of sequentiality – and vice versa. It is in this sense that my practice can be sited at the intersection of the structural and the sequential. Each of the films in this thesis implies an intrinsic relationship between object (a sequence of repetitions) and subject (a perception of repetition and also, therefore, of difference): a thing to be encountered and the person experiencing that encounter. Reflexively, I argue in this chapter that by deploying strategies and techniques that call attention to themselves within the specific context of a cinema setting, this relationship is also reproduced between film and viewer.

Lubiana Laibach, a moving-image document and cinematic stylisation of a circular, circumferential walk around Ljubljana, opens and concludes with what can and should be accepted as the same image: one recorded take, repeated. The walk and film were both constructed around the city's Path of Comradeship and Remembrance, a public trail marking the perimeter where the Italian and later German armies garrisoned and occupied the Slovenian capital and strategised against antifascist partisans between 1943 and 1945; snaking through hills, parks, cemeteries, industrial estates and residential neighbourhoods, the fortified garrison is memorialised today by the presence of a series of commemorative stone monuments designed by the architect Vlasto Kopač. More or less identical, these 70 or so grey obelisks are repeated frequently enough to present themselves to a walker such as myself – and perhaps to anyone adopting the Debordian technique of transient passage through varied ambiences – as a structuring device. Very early, *Lubiana Laibach* emerged as a film whose recurrent features would be measures not only of territory but of flux: it is a film that documents disparate environments in an urban space as well as the changes between those environments. In contrast to the unique appearance of each viaduct in *Lea River Bridges*, the more or less uniform design of the stone monuments that appear in *Lubiana Laibach* afford an intensified continuity within the frame itself. Consequently, while I had captured the distinct ambiences in *Lea River Bridges* by punctuating them with intervals of black screen, Ljubljana's stone monuments could be captured in such a way that, from one image to the next, they appeared to be the same monument: in deploying dissolves rather than cuts as the film's defining means of sequential transition, I could consciously expand upon and intensify those tensions set out in the earlier film, between sameness and variety, whereby one object within the frame appears to retain its characteristics while all other elements appear in a constant state of flux. Dissolving between the stones gave a

duration to this flux in a way that a straight cut denies: if the latter imposes an instantaneous switch from one environment to another, the former allows the two environments to exist simultaneously on the same screen. In filming each monument from the same vantage point, and in dissolving between them, I could emphasise their apparent sameness as a function of change. In other words, I could reduce the variables between shots even more than I had been able to in *Lea River Bridges*, and further explore the tension and relationship set out by that film between variation and continuity.

Figure 4. Spot the difference in* Lubiana Laibach*'s opening and closing shots

Consequently, if *Lea River Bridges* can be understood as a kind of diachronic survey of London, a montage of snapshot vignettes recorded over a particular terrain across a single day, *Lubiana Laibach* also encompasses a synchronic snapshot of Ljubljana, one in which the past can be evoked through the present. This pastness can be understood in basic terms, as one scene appears to always be dissolving into the next, or else coming into or receding from view, but it can also be understood in terms of a longer history, through the repeated and constant presence of stones designed to commemorate the city's past – and its traumas, and its losses, and its cultural identity as formed and constituted through these. Seen through this lens, the film's persistent mechanical gaze, its reproduction and repetition of durational images, evokes a living and contingent city that plays out in contrast to the stillness of the monuments themselves. As such, the film can be understood in terms set out by Rachel Aumiller (2017), as embodying a particular form of post-war European theatre "that identified the erection of architectural monuments as a superficial and rushed reconciliation with the trauma of World War II" (21).

The idea that emphasising the apparent sameness of these monuments could reveal these temporal uncertainties, could unlock a rich web of relationships between permanence and impermanence, between a city's memorialised identity and its lived realities, led me to centre on the monuments themselves, and on the reification of their identicality in terms of size and position within the video frame, and subsequently resulted in technical considerations in terms of how to film and where to film from. I had intuited that, while the monuments registered as identical to someone encountering them on a walk, a videoed approximation of this identicality would require some care, due to discrepancies – some subtle, others appreciable – between the monuments when considered side by side. Affirming both the film's structural-sequential nature and its tensions between sameness and variation, I shot *Lubiana Laibach* in such a way that I could edit – magnify, crop, resize, rotate – the recorded takes so that any discrepancies between one stone monument and another could be minimised. For this reason, in the final image of *Lubiana Laibach*, the stone monument is in fact slightly fatter than when it appeared in the opening shot: background details as illustrated in figure 4, such as changes to the position of a bin and information board, give away the manipulation. In other words, my desire and decision to minimise the variables between one stone monument and the next necessitated a commitment to manipulating each one; even if the individual manipulations were slight – on account of the more or less identical nature of the monuments – across 70 different monuments over 63 minutes of screentime, the aggregate effect is cumulative. As the film's editor, I had to make the monument

in the final image adhere more to the one immediately preceding it than to the one seen in the opening shot. In the equation A = A, then, the second A is different to the first by virtue of it having been digitally altered.

The point I wish to make here has less to do with the detection of such alterations by an audience than the tension between sameness and variation that is coded into the very construct of the film, and crucially the questions and mode of spectatorship that this tension prompts. I do not expect someone viewing *Lubiana Laibach* to notice the difference in the final and opening images so much as I hope they might question if it is the same shot, and indeed question if any of the film's apparent repetitions are repetitions at all. This questioning, this mode of spectatorship, is enough to characterise the film with some of the properties commonly associated with the structural film, as established in the previous chapter, which I also argue are shared by a particular kind of psychogeographic dérive: each engenders a form of attentiveness and engagement that I will elaborate upon a little more in this chapter and more fully in the next. My attempts to prompt such attentiveness informed certain decisions and interventions on my part when it came to the careful calibration of how to structure the film. One such decision – also elaborated upon later in the present chapter – was, for instance, how or where to open and close the film. I knew that the stone with which the film begins and ends did not necessarily have to be the same one at which I began and ended the walk; while one of these decisions is to do with practicalities, the other is to do with maximising a particular experiential effect. To walk the 21 miles of the route undertaken for this film is to experience a whole range of fluctuations in the physical, emotional and psychogeographic sense. Arriving at the same monument from which you set out feels like an accomplishment that is more intense, somehow, than arriving at the destination of a lineal walk (such as that undertaken down the River Lea, from Waltham Abbey to the Thames). In this context, *Lubiana Laibach* deepens and complicates Lefebvre's equation by calling attention to a more dialectical tension that emerges across a walk and film of such ilk: those more internal shifts, in the walker-viewer's perceptual architecture, that result from the exertions, exhilarations and experiences of the city's changing textures and ambiences across time and distance. The familiar sight, at the end of the walk, of the stone from which I started is imbued with all the new knowledges and experiences acquired on and through the journey since first seeing it. The overall effect here is predicated upon the cumulative nature of such experience, upon the durational properties of the walk itself: the familiarity of one's final destination affords a moment of contemplation from which one might affirm the hopes, naiveties

and narrative expectancies that defined the outbound stretch. Difference (change) is understood through repetition (familiarity).

Marxist historian Vijay Prashad alluded to this tension when I invited him to respond to Lefebvre's equation in a two-part keynote at the 2021 edition of Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival (Prashad 2021). Recognising the Heraclitean character of the prompt, Prashad remarked that while the idea that a person is not able to step into the same river twice may be true, due to the aphoristic fact that the water itself is in constant flow (and thus never repeating), it is also true due to the fact that the person stepping back into the river has also changed in the interval between the two instances. Henri Bergson (2010) also drew out the dialectical relationship between repetition, perception and persistence when looking at motionless objects, writing of a mental state "continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates" (2). Such assertions also apply to a single completion of the 21-mile Path of Comradeship and Remembrance, in which the stone monument encountered at the end is different to the stone monument from which one set off due to the physical, mental and perhaps even spiritual shifts that have occurred within the walker. A walk of this kind gives meaning to a pre-existing environment as much as it takes from it: seen as such, the walk is itself an interpretative and creative act. Likewise, as a film *Lubiana Laibach* attempts to provoke a mode of spectatorship that might be likened, however analogously, to that of the walk: a thing, an experience, of persistence in which certain recurrent features become measures of distance, duration and change. To become aware of distance and duration in this manner is to acknowledge the irrevocability of the change they constitute: though vague residues of an earlier waymark may haunt the memory, the walker must limit themselves merely to recalling it in the same way that a film spectator – at least under certain viewing conditions – can never return to a previous point (or to Lefebvre's first A). In my practice, such tensions are a defining feature of the experience: to prompt and embody a heightened and mobilised sense of the *experience* of watching a film. I will expand on the sense of disruption and play that such tensions generate in the next chapter.

Key to *Lubiana Laibach*'s mode of repetition, then, is the apparent persistence of its vantage point(s): without cuts to black, which punctuated the iterative rhythm of *Lea River Bridges*, this film unfolds as an ostensibly single dissolve that prompts the viewer to view change taking place. If one film is rhythmically punchy, the other drifts, providing a graphic constancy by which other fluctuations might be emphasised and measured. If *Lubiana Laibach* can be described in such terms, if cuts-to-black can be understood as ways of punctuating a narrative,

then the literary metaphor conjured is of a film eschewing particular forms of grammar. It is perhaps for these reasons that, years after completing it, I came to discover formal and thematic similarities between my film and *Zone* (2009), Mathias Énard's novel in which a narrator relays his histories – as a soldier in the Yugoslav wars, a civil servant in war-stricken and post-conflict Mediterranean territories and an international spy – in the form of a 500-page unpunctuated sentence. Unfolding as a kind of frenetic and forensic stream-of-consciousness that dwells repeatedly and to an almost comical degree upon violent traumas of European history, the novel teems with figurative ghosts receding from view as quickly as they appear, embodying an overall form that demands and activates a readership that is having to almost constantly reorient itself as to where one sequence ends and another begins; just as my attention drifted when reading Énard's novel, the viewer of *Lubiana Laibach* may enter an endless slippage of questioning between its long takes and extended sequences, with their apparitions of joggers running through frame, or cyclists riding through forests, or vehicles from separate takes mock-colliding at superimposed intersections. Like the prompts and triggers of Énard's novel, the dissolves between sites in *Lubiana Laibach* become constitutive of the everyday; they are normalised to a level of constancy, to the point of being its formal conceit – from which the marvellous can emerge and the revelatory can be received.

At any rate, the film's mode of repetition, of persistence, encompasses three interrelated features to consider when positioning the work more fully. This chapter will now focus firstly on the concept of stasis within film, outlining the ways in which *Lubiana Laibach*'s repetitions adopt and play with notions of stillness. If such stillness is experienced as a result of the flux to which it calls attention, my practice can also be discussed in terms of simultaneity: a dialectical practice in which motion and stasis are understood in tandem. Key to this dialectic are duration and slowness: this chapter secondly reflects on the significance of these features as well as that of the dissolve as a cinematic technique in constructing an experience of simultaneity. Thirdly, I will talk about the exhibition context of the film – a physical and socially codified context in which the very concepts of stasis and duration bear certain meanings, and from which an aesthetic of simultaneity can properly take hold. In reflecting upon these features, I consider the ways in which *Lubiana Laibach* instantiates ideas of temporal uncertainty, and how its imbrication of Ljubljana's past and present through formal means complicates the comparatively straightforward documentary approach of the other two films in the present thesis – whereby ontological queries as to how the film's images were produced enhance its power to

simultaneously activate an engagement with the past and also provide an opportunity to contemplate the ways in which commemorative statues may in fact obfuscate the history to which they pay tribute. Given the role that perception plays in these films, and the implication of an intrinsic relationship between spectatorship and form, it is important to ground and situate the present discussion in the real-world responses that the film has provoked. Although I have previously made clear that references to "the viewer" refer most broadly to myself, *Lubiana Laibach* does exist in the world, and this chapter will take as its structuring device the extended Q&A that took place after its world premiere at Sheffield DocFest in June 2021 – a useful gauge of what audiences take from the film and what kinds of questions a cinema screening might prompt.

2.1 Stillness and Motion: Interplays of the Incidental

In August 2019, as a Director of Alchemy Film & Arts, a charity dedicated to experimental film and artists' moving image in the Scottish Borders town of Hawick, I invited the filmmaker Karel Doing to undertake a short artist's residency, during which he would work with community groups to produce a new film. While in Hawick, Karel delivered workshops with volunteers at a local community garden on phytography, a plant-based technique of developing images on photochemical film, and to produce a series of film strips through this technique. The residency resulted, a month later, in *Bog Myrtle and Flamethrowers*, a multi-channel film exhibition on Hawick High Street. One part of this new work entailed three 16mm projectors playing film strips made during the residency, positioned adjacent to one another and turned on by a sensor when visitors entered the screening space. The extreme widescreen image resulting from the three projectors being placed alongside one another consisted of an abstract, ever-changing work that never repeated itself: abstract because each film frame had been generated by the placement of plant material directly onto the reel, and ever-changing because each of the three 16mm reels – looped to play ad infinitum – were a different length. Consequently, at no point could the projection as a totality repeat a side-by-side combination of three film frames. Although visitors to the exhibition were not to know this detail – their capacity to detect individual loops notwithstanding – the striking imagery combined with the audible and haptic presence of the film projectors in the space chimed thematically with the ecological and environmental interests of the project. Additionally, due to the material conditions in which the work was presented, each time a

reel looped through the projector, the film strip picked up new blemishes, new scars: by the time the two-week exhibition ended, the film itself had been irrevocably altered.

In placing plant materials directly onto film, and by decorating one individual frame after another in a similar manner, workshop participants had during Karel's residency developed a durational understanding of repetition and the moving image: plants had become tactile documents of time (Pattison 2019). Doing notes:

> I have worked for such a long time with 16mm and 35mm, so the moment I see individual frames I can translate them into movement and what happens during projection. I try to say things like this in my introduction, and sometimes interfere with it a little bit and give workshop participants some suggestions in terms of what could be the results. But because a lot of people are so new to this, they are also removed from translating what is on the table to what could be onscreen. Maybe I don't have to explain this. Maybe the fact that it is a surprise is one of the most interesting things about it. (in Pattison 2019)

Doing hints here at the connections between repetition and duration, and to the relationships between stillness and movement, innate to the filmic medium. The frenetic, chaotic speed at which the images in *Bog Myrtle and Flamethrowers* often gave way to one another speaks dually to the varying ways in which participants of Doing's phytography workshops understood film as a series of static frames as well as to repetition as a precondition for the perception of movement when a film is projected. Direct animation films, such as those by Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambert, also play with this dynamic, with the expressive motion of an abstract line bearing the trace of frame-to-frame variations: the slightly imperfect shimmers, the perceivable shifts in line thickness, of a hand-drawn image repeated again and again and again for the purpose of conjuring the illusion of movement – or at least a certain kind of movement. Similarly, attendants of Karel Doing's phytography workshop in Hawick began to experience duration and motion as matters closely attached to stillness and repetition: setting down different leaves from a single plant onto successive 16mm frames accommodated, for example, the repetition that allows for an image to be perceived in motion when the film is projected.

Justin Remes (2015) argues that "the experience of duration is one of the foremost preoccupations of the cinema of stasis" (13), referring to one tendency within avant-garde traditions to make explicit what has commonly been understood as a thing to avoid. Remes' example is the spectator who looks at their watch during a film: what might ordinarily be one measure of a film's failure (in immersing someone's attention, their suspension of disbelief) is for the cinema of stasis something to be engaged with, encouraged, provoked (ibid). Remes' other

example here, following Sitney's historicisation of the structural film, is Andy Warhol, whose innovation was to elevate the quotidian and the incidental to matters of primary interest. In films like *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964), Warhol makes not so much duration as an *experience* of duration his central theme. In both films, the tripod-fixed rigidity of Warhol's camera instils the viewing experience with an awareness of an apparent lack of change, not only in terms of viewpoint but also of what is being viewed: a man sleeping in real-time, for instance, or the Empire State Building recorded for such an extreme duration and from such an unchanging vantage point that the otherwise mundane appearance of an office light turning on within it becomes something of a revelatory event. As Remes remarks, "as a whole, nothing happens, and as a result it is difficult to view the film without thinking about how many hours remain. This is, in fact, one of Warhol's goals. One watches *Empire*, he claims, 'to see time go by'" (13-4).

That such films are often described using an especially subjective, context-dependent and taste-based language points to their marginal position within the industry as well as their conscious experimentation with the standards and conventions of cinematic practice. Additionally, ideas and discussions of stillness within cinema point inevitably to the overwhelming tendency among film critics and historians to consider cinematic experimentation from a technological or formal point of view – whereby stillness itself is theorised in contrast to established and normative expectations regarding motion, in terms not just of imagery and action but also of narrative progression (see Ahmed 2010: 39; Nawracaj 2016; Buser 2017). This form-oriented tendency is also reflected in broader cultural assumptions around film; it is no coincidence to me that responses to my own films, at least initially, tend to engage with questions of form. At both its public screenings and private showings, *Lubiana Laibach* has provoked more queries about how the film was made than anything else – as if audiences seek to unlock or resolve the machinations behind its trickery. Indeed, the subjectivity often adopted and integrated into descriptions of experimental art by academics and critics alike further affirms the central place that reflexivity assumes in such a context (see MacDonald 2001; Remes 2015; Balsom 2021). This reflexive mode, what Dominic Johnson (2014) calls the "radical contingency of the viewing subject" (211), often plays out to comic effect: as anyone who has assumed responsibility for test screenings at an experimental film festival will attest, figuring out whether a file sent by a filmmaker is deliberately or erroneously glitchy is an amusingly common challenge.

That much of the audience's curiosity has revolved around the combined effects of the film's stillness and slowness – the unique ways in which variation takes hold, for instance – also highlights the extent to which such formal strategies are still relatively untapped and/or underknown, or rather the extent to which the standardised grammar of film is still expected to serve protagonist-driven, goal-oriented narratives. Indeed, that both stillness and slowness are deployed in service of the incidental rather than the spectacular, the unplanned rather than the performed, also suggests a compulsion towards the medium's original innovations: like Warhol's, my films revive and invest in some of the abiding interests of film's early pioneers, whose outputs Tom Gunning (2006) defined and theorised as the "cinema of attractions". Delimited as the prevailing filmic method until around 1907, the cinema of attractions is one in which a proclivity for the incidental triumphs; this will be an important consideration in the next chapter, when discussing the broader political notions of looking (and listening) within my practice. That film experimentalists have returned repeatedly to the medium's basic capacity to frame and record motion, however, suggests that the mysteries of such technological innovations persist. With particular regard to the ways in which experimental films draw upon, call back to and long for the mysteries of these innovations, Erika Balsom (2021) notes:

> This affinity is unsurprising: pre-classical cinema, like much of the experimental tradition, stands outside the system of narrative integration that quickly came to dominate film production around the world in the first decade of the twentieth century. Gunning himself proposes that the cinema of attractions did not simply disappear after the transitional era but went "underground"; its non-narrativity and delight in visual curiosity were preserved on the margins, where they endure as an "unexhausted resource" … recalling all the things cinema can be and do if storytelling is shoved aside and new ways of seeing are sought after. (115)

Due to its emphasis upon the incidental – interplays of light, ripples of water, the wind in the trees – this kind of cinema often deploys and depends upon the uninterrupted take, in which motion and stasis can be experienced over time. As set out in the introduction of this chapter, I had worked the tensions between sameness and variation, between movement and stillness, into the very concept of *Lubiana Laibach*. Much like *Lea River Bridges*, the first challenge here was to make a film in which the persistence of motion is articulated while movement itself is denied: how to convey a sense of passage, in other words, without merely walking with the camera? Intuiting Vlasto Kopač's commemorative stones as objects affording an increased visual continuity than the Lea's bridges (an equivalent in the earlier film would have been if every

viaduct was built to the same size and design, the river unchanging in width), I decided early to dissolve between them – and to prolong the dissolves well beyond an audience's narrative expectancy so that the shifts encountered durationally by the walker might be translated to the screen.

In 2014, Galicían filmmaker Eloy Domínguez Serén filmed Sweden's Ericsson Globe, a spherical indoor arena in Enskede-Årsta-Vantö, a district south of Stockholm, from seven vantage points around the city. *In the New Sky* (2014), the six-minute short resulting from this endeavour, is a document of an urban space in flux: by means of extended but intermittent dissolves, morning turns to midday, and then afternoon turns to dusk, and then evening turns to night. Though the dissolves might ordinarily be undramatic, connecting disparate environments by way of superimpositions, they are given an unusual and mysterious quality by the continuous presence of the Ericsson Globe, which retains its precise position from one frame to the next. The porous phenomena that constitute a city's day-to-night trajectory are heightened by the film's soundtrack, a series of ambient recordings in which the sonic textures of otherwise distinct spaces blend seamlessly together. When I first saw this film, I was fascinated by the technical unknowns: the extent to which the filmmaker had digitally manipulated the image, the lengths to which he had physically gone to ensure the Ericsson Globe was always the same distance from his camera, the means by which he made sure it was in the same position each time he shot it, and whether or not the different takes were recorded – as the film's own internal rhythms suggest – in a single day. Even after Domínguez Serén revealed to me that he used a compass to draw a perfect circle around the building on a map, and had then filmed from locations on the line drawn, I had other queries regarding the film's optical precision. Such questions – or rather this state of questioning – also underpin the viewing experience of *Muri Romani* (2000) and *Muri Romani II* (2019), two feature-length films by Jon Jost that deploy dissolves to a seemingly continual degree. Comprising a series of fixed-frame, tripod-mounted shots of walls in Rome, neither of Jost's films reveals anything in visual terms other than the textured walls in close-up. The images are accompanied by everyday sound recordings taken in the Italian capital, which likewise bleed into one another by means of long crescendos and diminuendos, to the point where discerning a particular audio clip's beginning and end is impossible. Tellingly, Jost's own description of the film is framed more around the viewing experience than the film per se – reflecting and anticipating the especially subjective mode of spectatorship that the film's strategies of stasis prompt:

> As one watches the wall seems to change, invisibly, without technical means… Editing decisions were based on the aesthetic commonality between images so that one does not "see" a dissolve, but rather the image seems only to change in time. (Jost 2017)

My own use of the dissolve can be pitched somewhere between Domínguez Serén's and Jost's. *In the New Sky*'s interplay of stasis and flux is constructed, in the Bergsonian spirit, around a single motionless object – a building that retains its precise position within the frame – whereas *Muri Romani* and its follow-up unfold in absolute abstraction, the camera's proximity to the motionless textures before it precluding any sense of perspective or scale. Both films' extended use of the dissolve binds the steady-stare fixity of the moving-image take to the comparative-contrastive mode of viewing prompted by shots brought together in sequence. Warhol anticipated this connection, between the repetition of individual units on one hand and the durational persistence of attending to a single object on another. Referencing multi-film projects such as his *Screen Tests* (1964-6), and subseries such as *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* and *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women*, Balsom (2021) draws comparisons and through-lines between Warhol's career-long interests and occasional innovations, and the strategies of duration and stasis for which a structural filmmaker such as James Benning is renowned – and, I would add, for which films like *In the New Sky* and *Muri Romani* are so formally and experientially captivating. Series such as his *Thirteen Most Beautiful* films, Balsom notes, "point to Warhol's interest in seriality, in drawing out the tension between the uniqueness of each portrait subject and the standardised format used to capture their countenance. The films stage a conflict between the fixed repetitions of structure and the singularity of their subject matter, at once imposing sameness and heightening awareness to difference" (84). In the way they respond to walks which in themselves seek structure in and take meaning from recurrent urban features – repetitions, permutations – my own films also speak to this method, both engendering and documenting the ways in which sameness and variation can be considered and experienced synchronously.

Lubiana Laibach might be seen, then, as a synthesis of Jost's and Domínguez Serén's respective approaches: its serial reproductions of a designed obelisk are filmed and presented in a sequence that calls into question whether the obelisks are in fact different. The continuous dissolve between takes in my film functions to sustain the viewer's constant attention not only to what is within the image but also to what is not in the image (the space between images), as well

as to how the image was made. In this context, revealing how I shot the film and the decisions I made in making it have served to illustrate both the importance of stillness in soliciting a particular mode of looking as well as the ways in which a digital practice can continue, from the spectator's point of view, some of the questions historically thought of as specific to the frame-by-frame logic of analogue film. Such discussions also underline the suitability and applicability of my formal strategies, as outlined in the introduction of this text, to conveying the marvellous through the dérive: the ways in which a cinematic gaze promoting a fixation upon everyday sites can activate a contemplation of the rich complexities of history and memory that these sites evoke, and of the persistence of these complexities through a cinematic form. To again cite Énard's *Zone*, the extended dissolves of my film assume a kind of propulsive stream-of-consciousness, a narrative form in which scene-sentences merge, in which images prompt other images, in which the very formal components of the work mimic and sustain the spectator's own mental navigation of multiple histories, layers, ideas, threads. In disrupting and unsettling narrative expectancies and assumptions of ontological certainties with regard to how the image was constructed, the film also activates a mode of spectatorship that encourages the viewer to receive the present as a conduit *and* function of the past: not merely as a canvas through which the past can be experienced and understood *in distinction from* the present, but as a living and breathing culmination of that past. In this sense, the film goes beyond mere documentation: it is, to now emphasise a point made earlier in passing, a *stylisation* of a walk that was itself designed as an incidental engagement with and contemplation of a city's self-memorialisation, its strategies of remembrance, its attempts to navigate and immortalise political loss, cultural trauma and military victory. Again, it is perhaps telling that questions asked in response to *Lubiana Laibach* very often take the form of decoding: viewers want to know what exactly it is that they have just watched, and in electing to answer them to the extent that I do I have found myself generating a context in which the technical, conceptual and political are discussed in relation to one another. Stillness is key to *Lubiana Laibach* not only due to the ways in which it can and must be understood in tandem with ideas of motion, as mentioned above, but also due to the decisions I made in constructing the film in rhythmic and narrative terms. Additionally, notions of stillness should also be applied here to the immobile stones depicted within the film, which are encountered as repeated features only through and as a result of (bipedal) motion. As with *In the New Sky*, which follows a dawn-to-night trajectory, *Lubiana Laibach* articulates and approximates the incidental shifts ineluctably encountered on a walk of such length and variety.

The film steadily reveals and sustains a sense of present-day urban plurality alongside notions of temporal plurality, and the idea that any given moment contains within it both the histories (and traumas, and losses) whose confluence it embodies and the futures into which it may subsequently flow. While this sense of plurality is political for reasons I shall enunciate later, it was enabled by two early decisions – one technical, one conceptual – arrived at in pre-production to fully maximise the film's sense of stasis as well as its investigation of stasis as one defining element of an urban walk.

The first decision was around equipment. In the hope and expectation that the film might eventually screen in a cinema, I filmed *Lubiana Laibach* on a Canon C300, as distinct from the C100 on which I shot *Lea River Bridges*, due to its capacity to record in 4K and on the understanding that I would likely need to magnify some takes during post-production[2] in order to minimise any discrepancies between the stone monuments; shooting in 4K would allow me to retain image resolution when exhibiting such magnified images at scale.[3] At the mercy of what equipment and resources were available to me at Newcastle University, however, this decision severely restricted shooting capacities: limited to a single CFast storage card (necessary for shooting 4K video), I could record only 45 minutes of footage before having to return to my accommodation, thereby ending that day's walk. Though I had, quite naively, presumed that I might keep transferring footage to an external hard drive in situ before continuing the walk, pragmatics prevailed; while filming in autumn did benefit the film, for reasons I will outline in a moment, it did also narrow the window of daylight in which I could shoot. This reality, combined with the sheer volume of data resulting from my decision to shoot in 4K, was expressed no better than on the first day of shooting, on which I found myself sitting on an outdoor bench outside a supermarket for what ended up being several unanticipated hours, transferring multiple terabytes of footage to a laptop over a basic USB connection as the late-afternoon sky darkened. If such details reveal a constructedness, even an artificiality, behind a film pitched as a document of a single walk, they also point to the ways in which documentaries are themselves the result of mediation and intervention; building on my arguments around this in the previous chapter, I will

[2] For a discussion of the Surrealist process of 'enlargement', and of the importance of photography to Surrealism's pursuit of the marvellous, see Lowenstein (2007: 61).
[3] Discrepancies took two forms: those resulting from misjudgements on my part with regard to the distance between camera and stone, and those owing to factors such as a stone's subsidence. On the odd occasions where such discrepancies were not negligible enough to fix, I opted not to include the stone in the film – for instance, where digital manipulation such as "straightening" the image would have resulted in a visibly canting horizon, or when I filmed a stone too close, whereby a reduction in image size would result in a "pillarboxed" aspect ratio.

also expand upon them a little more in the next. The contradictions at play here are between the film's production context and the ways in which this might be disclosed and/or mythologised; that such contradictions emerge to such a recurring degree during Q&As speaks no doubt to the particular and previously described mode of spectatorship – attentive, reflexive, inquisitive – that the film's strategies provoke. Put another way, the frequency with which audiences and Q&A moderators tend to query such practicalities affirms the film's playful exploration of tensions between production and conception; to watch *Lubiana Laibach* is to enter, actively or otherwise, into a process of decoding.

The second and more conceptual decision I made in planning my shoot was where to begin (and thus end) the film per se. Where the walker joins the Path of Comradeship and Remembrance is a matter of proximity and preference: unlike the A-to-B specificity of a lineal walk, loops afford a range of options as to where one begins and ends. My choice on this front has, when walking the route, tended to be where the path intersects Celovška cesta, the busy road extending northwest through the city, due to it being the point closest to my accommodation in Ljubljana. In *Lubiana Laibach*, however, the commemorative stones within this vicinity do not appear until around two thirds into the film, as it enters an extended sequence of shots that are particularly busy in terms of incident and variety: what we might understand as the experimental film's equivalent of a final act. Such busyness was, in fact, the reason I did not begin and end the film where I began and ended the walk: *Lubiana Laibach* instead opens and closes in Golovec, a forested hill southeast of the city centre. That I made this decision very early may indicate my intentions and intuitions regarding stillness: arriving at Golovec a third of the way into the loop imbues the walk with a sense of quietude, serenity and stillness that announce themselves only in relation (and contrast) to the sensory maximalism of the city-centre environments preceding them. Although Golovec is very much within Ljubljana's limits, its absence of urban infrastructure, and of a sense of things happening, is striking. Again, to remark upon such characteristics is to suggest an intrinsic connection between stasis and motion: associating the former with a locale such as Golovec is made possible only in relational terms, in comparison that is to what could more commonly be understood as a bona fide city-like space. The comparative stillness experienced by the walker-viewer here is heightened also by the density of trees, which function not only to insulate the area from certain sounds but also to lend an overwhelming sense of repetition, verticality and immobility in terms of both the area itself as well as any scene-to-scene transitions within it.

It is primarily for this reason that I shot the film in autumn. Without their leaves, the trees' density, verticality and immobility were thus heightened to the point where these properties matched those of the commemorative stones so central to the image. As this chapter's epigraph suggests, the resulting stillness is almost photographic, free of the contingent motion by which the cinema of attractions is partly defined (see Schonig 2018; Fairfax 2018). Put another way, the graphic similarities between one shot of a forest and another shot of a forest, at least to first-time audiences not anticipating the durational transition between such shots, lends itself naturally to a state of questioning, and to a sense of tension and intrigue for the viewer in terms of whether or not a dissolve is taking place at all – what Lutz Koepnick (2017) has described as an "almost imperceptible visualisation of change [that] at first makes us think of it as a photographic image" (66). Indeed, several viewers have remarked that, until it is clear that the film is beginning to transition beyond this forested setting, it is its soundtrack – built and layered throughout the film in such a way that sonic shifts are often audible before any corresponding visual equivalent takes place – that prompts an awareness of any motion. Even here, however, as with *In the New Sky* and both *Muri Romani* films, the impossibility of discerning the start- and endpoint of the film's sonic textures tests one's perception, provoking from the outset a mode of spectatorship defined in part by uncertainties with regard to its own comprehension, understanding, authority, position.

It is perhaps due to such uncertainties that analyses of films deploying and drawing upon stillness often begin anecdotally, foregrounding and amplifying the subjectivity that underpins an act of spectatorship. Such tendencies not only reflect the capacity and effectiveness of stasis as a strategy in prompting self-awareness; they also highlight the extent to which such strategies make a separation of critical perspective from emotional experience difficult. Indeed, I would contend here that this very inseparability is what underlines the uncertainty of the viewing experience: like the film in question, analysis itself unfolds in and as a state of constant tension and evolution. Thus in his analysis of the 1966 Fluxus/George Maciunas film *Disappearing Music for Face* as a form of protracted cinema, Remes (2015) must frame a discussion of *how* the film functions with especial attention to *what* it does, opening with a careful description of the ostensibly still image with which the film begins:

> After several minutes, however, a slight change becomes noticeable. The smile is still there, but it seems less pronounced. One cannot help but question this perception, since at no point has the mouth (or anything else in the mise-en-scène) moved – or has it? Could it be that staring at this static face for a lengthy period of time has produced the illusion of change?

> After about five minutes, it becomes increasingly evident that the mouth … has been moving, albeit at a rate too slow to be perceived. (59-60)

Likewise, in his analysis of Larry Gottheim's *Fog Line* (1970), a real-time, fixed-frame depiction of fog gradually lifting to reveal a landscape and incidental activity taking place within it, Scott MacDonald (2001) finds himself combining a description of the film with a simultaneous breakdown of its effects: "For a few moments at the beginning of the film, viewers cannot be sure that the image they're looking at *is* a motion picture. Indeed, it is only once the fog has thinned enough for an identification of the image to be possible that we can recognise that something other than the movie projector – the fog itself – is moving" (9; emphasis in original).

Such remarks point to the ways in which the ambiguities that the cinema of stasis engenders are infectious, soliciting a mode of spectatorship that is contingent and open to/aware of change. This awareness of change is itself linked to questions of duration: Remes' repeated use of a word like "becomes", combined with phrases such as "increasingly evident" and "has been moving" also highlight the ontological slippage between past and present, whereby an awareness of what is happening is predicated upon a retroactive understanding of what has happened. MacDonald's critical insights regarding *Fog Line* similarly suggest a causal tension and logic within the viewing-decoding process: "it is only once [an event happens] that we recognise something". In this sense, the cinema of stasis approximates and intensifies the durational character of the walk, in which what is currently being encountered is firstly *always changing* and secondly understood in relation to that which has *already changed*. Seen in this context, *Lubiana Laibach* is very much a protracted film, its (digital) dissolve replacing the (analogue) slow-motion of *Disappearing Music for Face* or the real-time contingent motion of *Fog Line*. Seen as such, my film poses a direct challenge to Babette Mangolte's assertion that "without the emulsion grain, without the shutter, without the rhythmic pulsations of the film stock, digital film is unable to establish and construct an experiential sense of time passing" (quoted in Remes 2015: 142). Additionally, my choice to open the film in Golovec should be understood as a way of structuring uncertainty and contingency into the very structure of the film. Anticipating the playful, puzzle-like nature of *9 x 45*, which I discuss in the next chapter, the extreme stillness of the film's opening sequence functions to imbue the viewer with an awareness of their viewership, in which "the only movement [is] the movement of [the] eyes" (Carroll 2006: 185).

Things, however, do happen in *Lubiana Laibach*; the film's stillness cannot be considered in isolation. As the above slippages between present-tense description and past-tense

understanding suggest, this is a film in which distance is comprehended durationally, by means of retroaction. For the walker, retroaction is felt and understood physically: sore feet evidence miles notched. Present throughout this discussion of the film's stillness has been the fact that its scenes are connected via dissolves of extended length: durational transitions that simultaneously underline a sense of stasis (due to compositional continuities) while suggesting a sense of motion between scenes (due to fluctuations in texture and ambience). Like the mode of spectatorship it activates, then, *Lubiana Laibach* engenders a constant state of change even while its continuities persist. Indeed, the joy of watching films of this kind is partly to do with the ineluctable multiplicity of their persistence: the plural ways in which stillness can be felt and appreciated (see Buser 2017), and the challenge that they pose to both ideas of pleasure and tedium (Kahng 2015) and a post hoc literary breakdown of individual components. Such films produce not merely a repetition of units, but the presentation of ostensibly unceasing units (textured wall surfaces, commemorative stones, a giant orb filmed from different sides), perceivable eventually as a single unit. In this sense, stillness is affirmed and reified chiefly through duration: through the process, that is, of experiencing duration, where the unfolding of time is felt as if it were itself still.

2.2 All Things (Un)Equal: Slowness and Non-Narrativity

At the first opportunity for audience questions at Sheffield DocFest, one viewer asked: "When that cat passed through, were you like, 'Yes!'" Following a 63-minute film constructed around stillness, as well as a few opening queries about the process by which such stillness was achieved, the question brought to the room some welcome levity. It also implied a curiosity for the film's potential artifice as well as a narrative expectancy around incident. The moment to which the question referred, which begins in the film at 19:07 and as seen in figure 5, involves a ginger cat walking left-to-right through the frame's x-axis, towards and then behind the commemorative stone, before continuing and exiting frame-right, seemingly unaware of and indifferent to the camera whose gaze it momentarily disturbs. Another micro-narrative not unlike those discussed in the previous chapter, this moment again reveals the tension between structure and serendipity upon which my practice as both a walker and filmmaker depends. That there could be no ambiguity as to which cat the questioner meant, however, might go some way in indicating not only *Lubiana Laibach*'s relative lack of action but also just how challenging and uncommon it still is to encounter a film like this in a traditional cinema setting. (The questioner

does happen to be a colleague, whose attendance at festivals as an accredited journalist inclines towards narrative and commercial productions.) There is much to say here about the relationship between subjectivity, expectancy and context. Watching the film back, I find the moments immediately before the cat appears to be just as busy and sensorily overwhelming – due to the unpunctuated constancy of revelation, previously alluded to, through the film's unending dissolves – though I do accept and did predict that the feline's inclusion commands and focuses one's attention in a way that those preceding moments, without any living creature, cannot. While I will expand upon these tensions further in the next section, one's momentary fixation upon the cat and the micro-narrative it unwittingly performs for the camera affirms the film's minimalism; its minimal investment, that is, in generating a goal-oriented narrative whose trajectory is initiated and marked by incidents and actions relevant to it. In other words, a film in which a cat walking so nonchalantly through the frame becomes a discussion point is possibly also a film in which, to borrow Remes' description of *Empire*, "nothing happens".

***Figure 5. A cat walks through the frame in* Lubiana Laibach**

This is not only a cinema in which notions of visual stillness prevail, then, but also one in which time itself is liberated from standardised expectations of narrative. Such durational questions are often, like those pertaining to stillness, contested and defined in response and opposition to dominant stylistic trends. Linking duration to spectatorship, to the *experience* of

viewing, Tiago de Luca (2016) contends: "From the perspective of dominant cinematic models of narrative economy and its standard meaning-making patterns … shot duration is no longer dictated by, or subordinated to, audiovisual content" (29). De Luca's framing here is typical of critical and scholarly theorisations of cinematic slowness, evoking a form whose meanings are best understood in contrast to industry norms. In this context, slowness is defined as a conscious artistic deployment, the result of a creative decision, rather than an unintentional failure to sustain an audience's investment; in its emergence as a subgenre of art film, slow cinema exploits and leverages the deeply entrenched understanding and expectation that cinematic technique must always service a story – that as soon as a shot has served its purpose in communicating information relevant to plot, the film must proceed to the next shot, and so on. Despite and because of this, however, slow cinema has tended to be theorised within and as a certain storytelling mode, as a subversion and development of the post-war art film (Bordwell 1979) and exemplified by white middle-class Europeans such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman, and more recently by filmmakers such as Béla Tarr, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Abbas Kiarostami and Tsai Ming-Liang. Unlike these artists, however, I produce work alone: no cast or crew to speak of. Nevertheless, while my production model belongs more comfortably to a tradition that Balsom (2021) defines in contrast to "the specialist division of labour that prevails in both 'independent' cinema … and in many contemporary artists' engagement with the moving image" (91-2), a brief consideration of slowness and its functions in these filmmakers' works will help illustrate and situate its effects in my own practice. Though often distinct in terms of their production, funding and cultural contexts, such filmmakers share a common interest in the formal capacity of the moving image to capture the passing of time as much as its capacity to record movement per se. Often, such filmmakers seem to make a point of this durational mode, dwelling upon the incidental and background details of a protagonist's life: their real-time trip *to* a grocery store, for example, or their unabridged saunter *over* a hill, or their laborious trudge as they fetch water *from* a well. An emphasis upon the prepositions in these examples reiterates the relational understanding of space that slowness can provoke: cinematic slowness is an orientational mode in which the journey itself becomes of chief prominence.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such scenes – ordinarily omitted from Hollywood's studio outputs – often centre on walking, a mode of transit that itself emerges in contradistinction to the accelerated realities and everyday conveniences of twentieth- and twenty-first-century life. While the art film is generally understood to have embraced the moral ambiguities and narrative

uncertainties that emerged following World War II, however, its historicisation had a class dimension built into it from the off. Even Bordwell, in his initial theorisation of the art film, acknowledged the "tang of snobbishness about the phrase" (56) while hastening along its acceptance as a genre and thus its commodification within a distinct pocket of the film distribution circuit: the arthouse, latterly the independent cinema chain. Slow cinema emerged, similarly, from the transnational festivalisation of cinematic production (Tweedie 2013; Lim 2019). Though an analysis of the sociocultural complexities of taste is beyond the scope of this text, this class dimension is not insignificant given how common attempts to popularise slowness have become. Just as the art film's institutional emergence is traced to the post-war waning of Hollywood's dominance (ibid), slow cinema's critical positioning by advocates and detractors alike risks an overemphasis upon its departure from and therefore opposition to the perceived evils of a studio system – as if slowness itself is immune to routinisation and/or innocent of commercialisation. As initial theorisations of slow cinema made clear, this was to be taken as a cinema of quietude and contemplation (Flanagan 2008). While landscape emerges here as central to both human and nonhuman existence, the meditative lens through which it does so borders on a kind of political privilege. Affirming slow cinema as a dichotomous challenge to the continuity editing and ever-quickening shot durations that prevail in mainstream cinema, both the genre's proponents and sceptics interpret its durational strategies as something of intrinsic value: as, depending on one's disposition, an inherent improvement upon dominant modes or an absolute waste of time.

As Katherine Fusco and Nicole Seymour (2017) contend, however, to elevate slowness in this way is to often misconstrue it. Analysing Kelly Reichardt's films, Fusco and Seymour point to a tendency among critics to associate both onscreen depictions of slowness and an audience's appetite for slowness with a conscious rejection of prevailing modes of spectatorship and consumption; to make this association is to potentially depoliticise slowness, affirm it as a privilege (54-5). In Reichardt's practice, walking is often undertaken as a necessity by homeless protagonists, as in *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), by economic migrants, as in *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), or by outsiders struggling under the oppressions of everyday life, as in *Old Joy* (2006). Fusco and Seymour's intervention applies to a broad range of slow films. To their examples I would add the diffuse practices of Béla Tarr, Roy Andersson and Pedro Costa, in which slowness – walking, drifting – is often associated with societal breakdown, with ennui and anxiety, with political disenfranchisement and colonial displacement. Here, walking emerges less as a protest against

the realities of contemporary life than as an oft-unwelcome consequence of them. In locating and approximating an everyday pace outwith the norms established and continually revised by western capitalist dominance, such films fixate upon the durational to such a degree that their chief technique – the uninterrupted and often choreographed long take – begins to call attention to itself. What emerges is a slowness that is potentially troubling: not something in which to luxuriate, but in which to mentally meander, undirected, provoked by the plenitude pouring forth from dead time. As de Luca notes: "Not only does it supply the viewer with *time* to scan within and across the screen … it provides *too much time*, triggering a self-conscious mode of spectatorship whereby the viewer becomes aware of the viewing process and the time spent in such a process" (29; emphasis in original).

While *Lubiana Laibach* does not conform to the defining features of the art film, the function of its slowness – its deployment of slowness – can be understood in ways similar to those put forth by Fusco and Seymour, generating as it does a set of tensions around the subjective process of viewing. Several viewers have noted, for instance, the ways in which they drifted from a state of conscious spectatorship, in which they were actively aware of their own curiosity about and desire to decode how the film's images were made, and a mental state of distraction, in which their mind had completely drifted away from the film only for it to be pulled back and made alert again by some unexpected incident – such as, of course, the sight of a cat walking through frame. In that particular example, the animal's intrusion upon the frame calls attention to the frame's fixity: the film's slowness facilitates its sense of stasis and vice versa. To reinforce the dichotomy between narrative and non-narrative modes, this moment functions very differently to that scene in the 1953 western *Shane*, in which a dog, no doubt responding to offscreen direction, gets up from a position of rest and begins to walk across a saloon so that the camera may follow the creature from one human protagonist to another, thereby performing a narrative function by orienting the viewer spatially while articulating the tension and stakes of the standoff unfolding; by contrast, the cat in my film is an accidental walk-on whose movements are incidental to the film's compositional structure. Seen as such, the freight train that appears towards the end of the film may function as a means of pulling viewers back into an attentive mode just as it begins to reach its final sequence of dissolves: a sudden rupture as well as a climactic cue. (Trains, perhaps inevitably, feature often in Énard's *Zone*: not only are its memories narrated during a single train journey, its many streams and scenes also focus on the role played by trains during the Holocaust. At least one viewer has noted the train sequence in my

film to be evocative of the sinister and systematised use of trains across Nazi-occupied Europe, particularly nearby Trieste, which is very close to the Italian-Slovenian border.)

In this sense, *Lubiana Laibach* may also be understood as a furniture film, which Remes (2015) articulates as one whose aesthetic strategies induce and encourage a mode of mental drift. "When a composition or a film takes some unexpected turn, our attention is piqued; we become interested in what the next development will be. But when a musical phrase or cinematic shot is repeated again and again ad infinitum, the artwork fades into the background, and our attention becomes focused elsewhere" (40). Given the intrinsic tension between difference and repetition in music (see Herzog 2010), Remes' reference to it is apposite. I would liken this tension between focus and drift, between more and less conscious modes of spectatorship, to the experience of listening to a musician like Philip Glass. As I have noted elsewhere, and as quoted in a line of onscreen text in Mike Hoolboom's experimental film *Public Lighting* (2004), the seemingly infinite repetitions of a Glass composition can captivate the listener only for so long: "It's not the melody people listen to, but its persistence" (Pattison 2014a). The furniture film averts both boredom and critical derision by virtue of pre-empting them, and often by being screened outside the codified and determinative space of the cinema: as projections, for instance, in a space in which other cultural activity is unfolding. (As Remes points out, however, even Warhol's films have generated bad-faith readings and accusations from sceptics of opportunism (39-40).) Following Greg Taylor (2007), we may correlate the more and less attentive modes of spectatorship that viewers of *Lubiana Laibach* swing between to the fluctuations between what Thomas Wieskel (1976) had previously postulated as the positive and negative sublime. Taylor aligns the former to "the focused node, the loaded point/area of interest", positing it as "a specific textual device [that] can be used to direct the spectator's attention by offering one or more sites of concentrated surface or concentrated effect … heightened enigmatic points which pull us closer even as they reminds [sic] us that the magic window remains forever opaque". In contrast, the negative sublime hints repeatedly at "nothingness, sameness, literalness, 'on and on'."

In this context, *Lubiana Laibach* is very much *not* a furniture film, at least not in the vein Remes suggests. Though it may look like a form of artists' film better suited to an installation context, in which viewers can come and go as they please, and make such decisions independent of the time required to watch the film (see Patenburg 2012: 84), *Lubiana Laibach* has only screened to date in a cinema context, in which the film's own persistence in stillness and duration mirrors what Lev Manovich (2001) refers to as the "institutionalised immobility" (107) of the

auditorium (see also Baudry 1976; Remes 2015: 58-9).[4] Just as popular appraisals of the cinema-going experience have often inclined towards a hyperbolic image of hypnosis, I would argue that, while protraction does induce varying states of attentiveness, no cinemagoer is ever fully detached from their state of viewing, for viewing itself is an embodied act.[5] Like Jonathan Perel's *Toponymy*, *Lubiana Laibach*'s meanings reside in its totality: in the totality, that is, of its many tensions. One such tension only touched upon thus far, one that is very much rooted in the film's durational strategies, is the playful relationship between a narrative, promised by and teased at through unexpected incidents, and the apparent commitment to letting a scene play out without any intervention at all regardless of and due to a lack of incident. This is, to be clear, very much a result of the film's construction not only as a steady-stare film but also as a steady-*build* one: at least one viewer has admitted to feeling enthralled by the film's opening revelation of different scenes/monuments even as a quiet dread crept in that this was indeed all the film would be doing for the next hour. Rugo (2018) frames this dynamic as a frustration deriving from "the impossibility of demarcating the eventful from the uneventful … While the eventful describes a compression of time for the sake of maximum significance, the uneventful designates passage itself *as* significance" (162-3; emphasis in original). This tension, then, returns us to what Taylor describes as "the promise of something more" and the deflection of our attention "onto sameness itself … and landscape as impenetrable plenitude. Now everything can become equally (un)interesting."

Like the walk, *Lubiana Laibach* constructs and provides an experience that is both bodily and mental, involuntary and active, geographic and psychic. Just as the walker's repeated, foot-after-foot muscle memory coexists alongside a relentlessly variegated and permutational state of observation and reception, the film's persistent, protracted dissolves guarantee a constant renewal of audiovisual information while permitting, through the very denial of movement as such, a more figurative wandering away from the film's images and sounds. In this way, the film might be considered suspenseful: not in terms of whether some possible narrative outcome may come to fruition but rather whether the form itself may enable some kind of transcendental moment. In

[4] For a broader range of histories focusing on the cinema space and its relationship to spectatorship, as well as the ways in which films have exploited and experimented with this relationship, see Hansen (1991), Friedberg (1993), Stokes and Maltby (1999), Acland (2003), Jancovich et al (2003), Shaw and Weibel (2003), Gunning (2006), Marchessault and Lord (2007), Bellour (2013), Rogers (2014).

[5] The apparently hypnotic effects of cinema have been cited countless times by critics, scholars and philosophers, perhaps most notably by Roland Barthes (1986: 345-9) and most persuasively by Raymond Bellour (2014: 1-24). See also Radner and Fox (2018: 155-74).

theorising transcendental style and historicising it as a precursor to slow cinema, Paul Schrader (2016) illustrates how the delayed cut – as distinct from the smash cut – elicits a particular kind of spectatorship. "The smash cut depreciates the viewer's participation; the delayed cut demands it" (18). The only cut in *Lubiana Laibach* is that with which the film ends: a delay of 63 minutes. The only moments in which there is no dissolve taking place onscreen are those with which the film opens and closes. In between, there are always at least three different scenes onscreen at any given time; fascinated by the mode of decoding prompted by the film's form, and by the notion that some viewers may take it upon themselves to identify the start and end of shots, I deliberately timed each dissolve so that its fade-in would register just as another was about to end – thus frustrating an imagined attempt to delineate the origins of each take. This difficulty is most obvious, to me, during the first six or so minutes of the film, in which the forest itself lends the images a heightened sameness even by the film's own standards: look carefully at the way the bark of individual trees never quite reaches full opacity, as in figure 5, due to the constant and simultaneous reveal of a new scene just as another disappears. If such manipulations reveal a perversity in the film, they also point to the ways in which suspense and anticipation are formal constructs: their effect is to give the viewer cause to turn inward, to introspection, so that they might even begin to question the value and purpose of the viewing endeavour. In this context, the spectatorship demanded of *Lubiana Laibach* is both active and passive: never not active and yet always prone to distraction, however reflexive or productive this distraction may be. My earlier, parenthetic example of a viewer suggesting a connection between the appearance of a freight train near the end of the film to the transportation method of choice opted for by the Nazis during the Holocaust becomes especially telling, here: to make such a connection requires active interpretation that is itself a form of distraction, the result of a kind of intellectual and emotional labour on the viewer's part not unlike that mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to *Toponymy*. Like the walk to which it responds, *Lubiana Laibach* posits a mode of engagement in which connections between the past and the present, between mundane and fascistic conceptions of cargo are not merely legitimate but made possible in the first place. As such, the film builds into its very structure a way of seeing and receiving images (and sounds) that is never not connecting the present moment with near- and distant-past moments. The constancy of such connectivity, amplified by the temporal stasis at play, prompts a kind of eternal parenthesis, in which one thought-image sits atop another, in a way not unlike how the conflicts of *Zone* are "laid upon one another like layers of rock" (Silverman 2011).

***Figure 6. Teasing opacity in* Lubiana Laibach**

If one ultimate outcome here is similar to the Surrealists' conception of the marvellous, in cinematic terms the overall effect might also be one of transcendence. Schrader writes of the spiritual element often engendered by transcendental style, viewing stasis itself as an endpoint: an acceptance on the viewer's part of an alternative onscreen reality constructed through temporal manipulation (3, 24). As this chapter has thus far demonstrated, slowness is experienced subjectively, and is therefore understood relationally. For a sense of stasis to register at all requires a preceding state of activity, of sensory bustle that is itself understood as a means of delay or even deferral: a mode of suspense that confronts and exploits Deleuze's concept of the event, which Remes breaks down: "As a consequence of the inordinate slowness of protracted cinema, one no longer waits *for* an event; rather (as in the plays of Beckett), waiting *becomes* the event" (73; emphasis in original). While the stasis-defined transcendental moment to which Schrader refers more often than not follows some miraculous event, *Lubiana Laibach* refuses stylistic rupture, persisting with its head-height tripod-locked gaze as if to reject or defy a top-down pretension of an all-knowing vision; the film investigates urban space all too aware of its observational limitations, exemplifying what Balsom (2021) calls the "necessarily partial and located" (129) vantage point of the ground-level view. Again, *Lubiana Laibach* must be considered here in terms of its credentials as steady-build as much as it is steady-stare; in its

gradual shift from the forested hills of Golovec to Ljubljana's residential neighbourhoods, the city's noisy arterial roads, and the busy lunchtime road traffic that passes through its industrial districts, the film slowly reveals a city that grows in visual activity and sonic volume. The film does so, crucially, so that in its final moments, in completing its documentation of a circular walk, it returns to the stillness with which it began. Put another way, just as its opening stasis is established so that its illusion of sameness can be revealed, *Lubiana Laibach* builds so that its sense of action can plateau. Indeed, another reason as to why and how my film challenges the furniture aesthetic set out by Remes is that it does conform in its own way to the narrative structure of a beginning, middle and end: just as one might sense that one has entered the latter stages of a walk, viewers have noted that they do intuit when the film is drawing to a close. In progressing from a state of movement back to stasis, *Lubiana Laibach* approximates the walk's spiritual sense of accomplishment (see Remes 2015: 8), and also lays the groundwork for *9 x 45*, the third film of this thesis in which walking away from a city-centre hubbub translates to an increasing sense of stillness.

If such stillness takes meaning from a preceding sense of motion, it functions similarly to silence, which is often haunted by the sonic residues of preceding noise. The quietude here is distinct from that first laid out by early theorists of slow cinema: it is less refuge from urban life than an assertion and iteration of the relationship between noise and silence, and between movement and stasis, between a destination-oriented journey and a passage as an end in itself. In rethinking transcendental style in an era of slow cinema, Schrader outlines three directions for a cinema freed from the "iron nucleus of narrative" (25): the surveillance camera, a kind of tautological assertion of the camera's capacity to observe; the art gallery, or an inclination towards the abstract interplay of colour and light; and the mandala, an aspiration towards trance and meditation, and an acceptance that "there is nothing more a movie can offer" (31). On the diagram Schrader (32) composes to illustrate the relationship between these three prongs of cinematic non-narrativity, Warhol is the only artist to appear twice: equidistant between the surveillance camera and the art gallery (observation as a mode of abstraction) as well as the surveillance camera and the mandala (observation as a means of meditation). "Does durational cinema strive for the surveillance camera or the mandala? Is it an unremittingly open eye or the source of enlightenment?" (31) For Schrader, as if to demonstrate the fluidity of these modes and the subjectivity to which I have repeatedly alluded in this chapter, the answer to this question is contingent: "One viewer watching the fog drift from the mountains might find it an exercise in

contemplative boredom; another might experience it as transcendental meditation" (ibid). In its application of the focused steady stare, in the consequent time and space it affords to the incidental, and in the way it gradually and durationally builds a sense of audiovisual multitude before reducing down once more to a minimal scene suggesting stasis (walking into a city, and then out of it back into the hills), *Lubiana Laibach* can be positioned within all three of Schrader's non-narrative modes. The film's return to Golovec is a reiteration of the observational, the abstract, the meditative. In these latter moments the film offers a moment to reflect upon the preceding journey: its challenges, its value, its purpose. Why walk? Why film? Why watch?

Teasingly, however, in *Lubiana Laibach*'s very final moments – just as the viewer may realise that the film has returned to the same image with which it started, or at least begin to question if this is the case – the dissolve begins again. Indeed, the film in fact ends mid-dissolve, on an image that contains the first two scenes overlaid. The crescendo-cum-expansion of sounds that took place during the film's first dissolve also begins again: birdsong thrives once more. One might interpret this as another perverse joke: a brief and taunting suggestion that the film is about to repeat itself, a reward or punishment to the viewer in the same way that completing then immediately repeating a 21-mile walk might be considered extreme regardless of one's perspective and health. Additionally, the appearance of an authorial credit and the film's year of completion during this sequence might be read firstly as a confirmation that the film is coming to an end and then secondly as an unusually delayed confirmation that this might in actuality be the film's *start*, or at least a narrative renewal as in the (slow) cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, whose feature films are often bisected into halves by the playful appearance of a title-card midway through the runtime. A possibly long-awaited moment and also a possibly unexpected one, the appearance of "MICHAEL PATTISON / 2021" is a provocation of simultaneous thrall and dread, like the earlier example of one viewer reluctantly and bemusedly accepting that the film would follow through upon its minimalist promise, its fluctuation between the positive and negative sublime. Recalling this chapter's epigraph, viewers may have segued – some more dramatically than others – from questioning if the onscreen image is moving to wondering if the film itself will ever end. As with Remes' description of protracted cinema's generation of alternative temporalities, "the film can only be viewed in 'real' time, but one's perception of duration is inescapably altered by staring at this universe in which time has been radically transmogrified" (81). As we have seen, due to the digital manipulation of the images

themselves, *Lubiana Laibach*'s final moments both repeat the film's opening and do not repeat the film's opening; in the equation A = A, difference and sameness are concurrent guarantees.

2.3 Lubiana = Laibach: Sameness and Difference Together

In provoking a spectatorship that is conscious of itself, slowness and stillness both enliven and complicate the cinema space, which has often been, as mentioned above, understandably but unhelpfully hyperbolised as a space conducive to hypnosis and in contrast to what Kate Mondloch (2010) calls the "participatory sculptural environments" of installation artworks (xiii). To be clear, while exhibition and installation contexts can offer a spatial dimension and freedom of movement that the cinema does not, the mode of consumption generated by the latter is far from passive. To even accept the architectural monopoly of the multiplex is to perpetuate the standardising power of capital; as both a professional critic and habitual cinema-goer, and as a curator whose remit often entails the exhibition of moving-image work in disused mills and high street shops, I concede and contend that no two cinemas are ever the same, for entering each space is an embodied act that takes meaning from the room's lighting and leg-space, the state and size of its screen, the technical standards of its projection, its sightlines and smell, the texture of its seats, one's own emotional disposition, and much more besides. By anticipating and confronting boredom, and by aspiring to the transcendental, slowness and stillness merely heighten and enhance subjectivity: they did not invent it. As such, in imposing a relative immobility onto the viewer, the cinema's seated layout can often compound a sense of stillness emanating from the screen. That I once attempted (and failed) to sit through a public screening of James Benning's two-hour single-take film *Nightfall* (2011) without moving in my seat, that I once took to counting the number of carriages on a freight train during a screening of his three-hour single-take epic *BNSF* (2013), is a reflection not of either film's tediousness but of the playful viewing conditions that their minimalism generates. Such conditions imbue the viewing experience with a tautological and perhaps even truistic assertion of the subjective: I fidget, therefore I am. In this way, the sentiment that "nothing happens" in a Warhol film can be understood as a logical culmination, a natural reversal, of the ostensible stillness unfolding in the cinema itself.

Films such as Abbas Kiarostami's *Shirin* (2008) and Mark Lyken's *1300 SHOTS* (2020) test out this twist. In each, the camera observes people watching films that we, as an audience, never see. Though both films deploy different methods, each is a highly constructed set-up. In the

case of *Shirin*, more than 100 women were filmed in separate close-ups, apparently absorbed in the act of watching an offscreen movie; edited together and accompanied by another film's real-time soundtrack, these disparate performances lend a sense of solidarity in stillness – an illusion through montage of a single film being watched by different women brought together in unison. In *1300 SHOTS*, Lyken observes two people, a woman and a man, watching Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925); while the film's title alludes to the number of shots in the offscreen film, Lyken's own work contains only two uninterrupted takes – a camera filming each cinema-goer – presented as a single split-screen frame in which the spectators' physical proximity as well as emotional relationship to one another are continual points of interest. One can speculate regarding the extent to which the performers in these films received direction, but the point is the revelation in each of an active and embodied spectatorship that might be taken as yet another expression of the tension between sameness and variety, structure and chance; one moment in *1300 SHOTS* sees its female observer crying while its male observer reaches for a can of Tennent's Lager. Indeed, in its codifying tendency, the cinema space is itself a structuring device, standardising patterns in human behaviour even when permitting the unrepeatability of each emotional response. In the cinema, nothing happens just as everything happens.

At Sheffield DocFest, the three-way interplay between the screening venue's carefully calibrated conditions, the festival's high technical standards, and the unanticipated hazards of delivering live events mirrored and enhanced the in-film dynamic between structure and serendipity that I have already established as a key feature of *Lubiana Laibach* and my practice as a whole. While the festival had previously taken pains to ensure my screening copy was free of unwanted glitches, for instance, the showing itself included the presence of a fly – either in the projection booth or the cinema per se – whose periodic proximity to the projector bulb caused a shadow, identifiable as that of the insect in question, to appear onscreen. I interpreted this accident less as a digital revision of *Mothlight* (1963), Stan Brakhage's analogue exemplar of avant-garde abstraction in which insects and earth were placed directly onto the film strip, than as a useful reminder of contingency itself. The cinema light is blinding: in the way that the fly's shadow drew attention to the presence of a projection booth, a space whose labour has tended to suffer omission in considerations and appreciations of the exhibition context (Stubblefield 2010), a space whose manual human presence has been called into question within the contexts of digitisation and automation (Gibbons 2016), these moments also revealed and reiterated my own labour in producing the film, made invisible by the locked-off camera and the strategies of

mystification and opacity that I shall elaborate upon in a moment. In short, rather than ruin my experience of *Lubiana Laibach*'s world premiere – as I think it may have done had it occurred, say, four years ago – the shadow play illustrated to me the necessity of seeing this kind of film in a cinema setting. I want in this final section to consider some of the ways in which this exhibition context is key to understanding and receiving the totality of the film's internal relationships, as well as the aesthetics of simultaneity that these relationships underline throughout my practice.

Its myriad cultural permutations notwithstanding, the cinema space's defining features are generally accepted and commonly understood. That its standardisation, its architectural givens, emerged historically in the context of vertical integration meant that it developed in tandem with the regimentation of production modes and distribution models: it is to take nothing away from film as an art form to suggest that its business models have tended to rely upon innovations of and within established formula (Cousins 2004). As I have previously suggested here, to screen a work produced outside such industry norms in a setting built by and for those norms can often disrupt the expectations, the conscious and unconscious biases, brought into the screening space – hence what we might lament as the continued and depressing importance of film festivals in platforming work that challenge preconceptions of what constitutes the cinematic. Never mind what attendees of a cocktail party might make of a looped projection unfolding on a white wall over the course of an evening (an image Remes conjures in describing the furniture film); what kinds of experiences are made possible when such a work is screened before an audience that has paid to sit still and see it, in silence, in the dark? As de Luca (2016) notes, "slow time makes cinema visible, turning the film auditorium into a phenomenological space in which a collectively shared experience of time is brought to light for reflection" (25). Again, the architectural certainty of the cinema can often inform and compound one's experience. I recall here moments when I have felt a two-fold exasperation during a film due to both onscreen tedium and my exit route being an awkward gauntlet of strangers' legs along a narrow, dimly lit row.

Filmmakers such as James Benning, operating between conventional narrative modes and pure abstraction (Ward 1979: 11), exploit this contextual immobility by integrating it into their own aesthetic style. I can attest, however, to the relative difficulty of sitting still to watch a Benning film in a gallery; in contrast to my experiences seeing *Nightfall* and *BNSF*, I found myself distracted by and in a tussle with all manner of phenomena when trying to watch *L. Cohen* (2018), Benning's 45-minute shot of a solar eclipse over an otherwise nondescript oil field at the foot of Mount Jefferson in Oregon, as part of a group exhibition in Berlin: bad headphones,

moving spectators, sound bleeds, backless seats. It was as if, I thought at the time, the gallery never considered that someone might want to watch the work in full – and given the durational steady-stare build to the eclipse itself, and the transcendental resumption of ordinariness that follows this recorded event, I would argue that the work does make more sense, both emotionally and narratively, when seen in full. Similarly, at the 2014 edition of AV Festival in Northeast England, the critic Neil Young (2014) made a point of watching Wang Bing's 14-hour documentary *Crude Oil* (2008), which was showing in seven-hour chunks on alternating days across the entire month of March that year, as closely as he could to a cinema sitting; on the second day, owing to the relative discomfort of the exhibition hall, he had contemplated fetching his own portable heater. As de Luca suggests, slow time requires a cinema space "not to heighten … the impact of hyperbolic and immersive features but to facilitate a sustained perceptual engagement with audiovisual elements onscreen" (26). In an installation space where footfall and intimacy visibly fluctuate, the viewer can realise they are the only one watching a screen or film projection; a precondition for this realisation, of course, would be a breakdown in their own attention, prompted perhaps by the same unaccommodating features of the space that I have just mentioned. In contrast, de Luca notes, with its all-eyes-on-screen demands, the cinema "may prompt the spectator to look around and see whether such feelings are being shared by other spectators or make one wonder what other viewers within the same site are making of such a film" (39). Just as the cinema's codified stillness may be integrated into an image, in-film stasis also translates to the cinema space, provoking "a renewed cognizance that one is powerless to manipulate the temporalities to which one is being subjected and also that one is watching a film in the auditorium with an audience of strangers (unless, of course, one decides to walk out)" (ibid).

Like Benning's *Nightfall*, in which a forest in the Sierra Nevada mountains is observed during a real-time shift from dusk to darkness, or his *FAROCKI* (2014), in which the time it takes for an overhead cloud to fade to vapour lends the film its module of composition, *Lubiana Laibach* is structured around an event that satisfies a narrative trajectory in rhythmic if not dramatic terms: as established in the previous section, if the stillness of its closing stages is to be perceived as such, one needs to have experienced the steady-build that precedes it. In terms more akin to Schrader's conception of slowness and non-narrativity, we might say that for the film's minimalism to have any kind of effect at all, its maximalism must also register. Transcendence in Schrader's terms would take the form of accepting the parallel reality proposed by the film,

which is less a post-miraculous reality than an assertion of and return to the quotidian joys of quietude or indeed minimalism, which have been revealed by and through the film as anything but. In other words, in journeying through more conventionally understood urban spaces, *Lubiana Laibach* primes the viewer to return to the forested hills of Golovec with a renewed awareness of the ways in which their ostensibly more minimal ambience is full of maximal delights, both rhythmically and texturally. In this way, the film again approximates the ways in which walking itself actuates an apparatus for joined-up and dialectical thinking: we arrive at and journey through one space as a kind of repository of memories of another, so that Golovec has the lingering, ghost-like residues of city-centre textures reworked into it. Seen as such, watching *Lubiana Laibach* in one sitting is as essential to the experience, for me, as completing the 21-mile circular walk in a single attempt.

To speak of spaces in this way, as if they exist only as distinct names with clearly marked boundaries, is inadequate. When I began to take regular walks across London, in the period that led to my conception of *Lea River Bridges*, I was fascinated by the extent to which otherwise disparate pockets of the map bled into one another: as noted in the introduction to the present text, this was not a transition through the city by the Underground, with people descending and ascending according to automated announcements of territory, but a porous segue, a physical drift not unlike the smooth pursuit of an eye as it follows a moving object, or even the panoramic vantage point afforded by a panning camera. That such phenomena can be described and allegorised with reference to cinematic technique is surely no coincidence: the dissolves by which *Lubiana Laibach* proceeds through its images are crucial to its investigation of simultaneity across urban space. Here, space is experienced both sequentially and concurrently: while scenes do follow one another, they also coexist in the frame. The film examines and communicates the urban experience, space itself, as what Doreen Massey (2005) calls "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions … as a sphere of the possibility of the existence of the multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist … as always under construction … always in the process of being made" (9). Framed as such, walking and filming a city, or rather each moment of a walk or film, becomes "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (ibid). In *Lubiana Laibach*, images simultaneously reveal and constitute a plurality that is itself always under construction. The city moves, even when it doesn't.

The film image and cinema space are also, in their own way, products of interrelations; in both, distinct trajectories also coexist. As films like *Shirin* and *1300 SHOTS* have made clear, even when sat in unison, film spectators can encounter a movie in radically different ways, constituting individual experiences that can be understood rhythmically, biologically, physiognomically, emotionally and in ways that are not visible or immediately recordable. It is by advancing a theory of stasis within cinema, and by arguing for stasis as a defining proponent of cinema, that Remes (2015) asserts an "aesthetics of multiplicity" (25). How better for film to draw attention to the ontological differences between itself and photography than by assuming the snapshot-stillness commonly accepted as a key tenet of the latter? In keeping still, in other words, the film and video camera captures and vivifies contingent motion *as* motion; here, the always-happening nature of an under-construction phenomenon is felt in all its multitude. In this context, the mid-scene cut-to-black with which the film ends affirms the multiplicity that walking trains and conditions us to expect (DeLana 2021: 76). In ending mid-dissolve, the film articulates an instantaneous tension between the positive and negative sublime: the possibility of something new in the same moment as an on-and-on repetition. It is a simultaneity of stories-not-yet-told.

One part of the film's strategy in heightening this sense of simultaneity is its sound design. From *Lubiana Laibach*'s very opening moments, what might be perceived as a still image is vectorised by sonic multiplicity: audible but indistinct voices, the distant hum of an urban centre, and a crescendo of birdsongs. This is an example of what Michel Chion (2019) describes as sound locating and anchoring an otherwise immobile frame in a "temporal continuum" (13). Chiming with my earlier remarks regarding both the enhanced subjectivity and process of decoding that experimental film often plays to, Chion demonstrates the heterogeneity with which sound is experienced, delineating three different modes of listening: causal (detective and figurative), codal, and reduced (22-7). In the first of these modes, the listener determines the in-film source of a sound and/or the technical means by which it was made; in the second, they infer additional meaning from the relative and changeable properties of the sound; in the third, they listen to the sound independent of its cause and meaning, as a texture in itself. By combining a sense of stasis independent and regardless of what movements and incidents unfold before and around the camera on the one hand, and a sense of perpetual motion through a constant dissolve between takes on the other, *Lubiana Laibach* proposes an experience in which all three kinds of listening are made possible in the same moment – an experience in which the boundaries between on- and offscreen space, between the eventful and uneventful, between relevance and irrelevance,

are increasingly blurred. In other words, experience itself becomes causal, codal and reduced: walking and watching are in this context investigative and textural acts. In this context, my film resembles Balsom's (2021) description of Benning's *TEN SKIES*, a series of ten-minute takes of different skyscapes, which produces a complex mode of spectatorship by combining minimalism with abstraction, "caught as it is between the fixity of structure and a flooding forth of details without hierarchy" (118). Dominic Johnson (2014), channelling Michael Fried (1998) and Hal Foster (1996), anticipates such sentiments when promoting minimalism as a mode that calls "the viewer into play as an embodied, self-conscious subject [which] destabilises the shibboleths of value and quality" (217-8). This apparent lack of hierarchy, this flooding forth of details – which, as I have stated in both the previous and present chapters, are themselves the partial consequence of manipulation and/or construction – presents an urban space defined by multiplicity and simultaneity that extends and expands into the cinema space itself: the fly obscuring the projector, for example, unsettles the screening room's fixed hierarchies between viewer (anonymous, subjective, in the dark) and screen (defined, objective, light itself).

Additionally, not only do the soundscapes in *Lubiana Laibach* bleed into one another in a way that makes a distinction of when they begin and end impossible; they also often unfold in an even more protracted manner than the film's pictures. In technical terms, this entailed bringing in the sound of a recorded take before its image, and similarly allowing the sound to linger after its correlating visuals had disappeared. While *Lubiana Laibach* has mostly sync audio – whereby what we hear corresponds to the real-time image-sound recording – I took the liberty of separating image from sound in some takes where their synchronisation was not apparent, so as to calibrate a particular effect: using the stretch of audio containing an overhead helicopter, for instance, and pairing it to an uneventful image of a wall. Again, we may view such decisions and strategies as aesthetic approximations of the walk and how sound can often function at once for the walker as a present-moment orientation device, a means of anticipating (and taking stock of) changes in ambience along a walk's trajectory, and a way of evoking a world in which considerations of the present alongside the past are made not only possible but also a key conceptual underpinning, a structuring principle and reason to undertake the walk in itself.

Towards the end of *Lubiana Laibach*'s ninth minute, we hear the gradual introduction of an agricultural vehicle, whose drone-like persistence and machinic timbre may register as different to the soundscapes that have hitherto defined our understanding of on- and offscreen space. While the film's soundtrack has thus far combined crescendos of birdsong, the occasional

coming and going of joggers' footsteps, and nearby human voices, the distinct protraction of the vehicle's hum disrupts what has been established as a forested setting – as if it is willing a new kind of onscreen space into fruition. Indeed, many of the film's shifts in ambience and texture are pre-empted and/or corroborated by segues in sound. In this way, sound enhances the anticipatory mode of walking, producing its own repetitions, continuities, disruptions. "In doing so," Loepnick (2017) states,

> [sound] does not simply remind us of what we do not see or allow us to speculate about what might be to come, but also encourages us to explore what is truly architectural about the cinematic experience – its ability, by engaging multiple sensory systems at once, to situate viewers in three-dimensional environments. … It invites us to see the visible world as one of ongoing connections, stories, transformations, and blockages. Sound defines the cinematic frame as a medium to produce unsettling perceptions of presence and absence, here and there, now and then. It defines space as something neither a film's characters nor their viewers can ever fully own, inhabit, or master – something that exceeds our control and that is charged with multiple temporalities and stories to be told. (184)

In films such as *Lubiana Laibach*, or *TEN SKIES*, or *Muri Romani*, sound is especially architectural and dimensional: it is both specific and suggestive, orienting spectators through a space that is defined and visible while also alluding, constantly, to one that is less defined and less visible. This simultaneity is perhaps most evident in those moments in *Lubiana Laibach* where human voices can be heard: a behind-the-scenes reality of my camera-mounted shotgun mic picking up fleeting snippets of conversation from people who did not enter the frame. The constant slippage between Chion's modes of listening produced by such films draws attention, finally, to the ultimate inadequacy of terms such as onscreen and offscreen, and therefore of other terms such as viewer and spectator. Just as the walker's understanding of space is not merely visual, the film viewer is also a film listener. As Chion remarks: "The very term *offscreen sound* is deceptive … We have only to close our eyes or look away from the screen to register the obvious: without vision, offscreen sounds are just as present … as onscreen sounds… Offscreen really refers to a *relation* of what one hears to what one sees, and it exists only in this relation" (81; emphasis in original). Again, in taking place exclusively in cinematic settings, films such as *Shirin* and *1300 SHOTS* reflect upon and call attention to this dynamic: by simultaneously inverting and making literal the definition of on- and offscreen space, they upend the hierarchies and causal logic assumed of cinematic sound and image. Without hierarchy, simultaneity: to repeat an earlier point, everything is now of equal (un)interest.

Underpinning such arguments are the films' stillness and slowness, and the same properties as experienced in the exhibition space per se. As is made clear by works such as Tsai Ming-Liang's ongoing *Walker* series (2012-present) or Eva Wang's *Futility* series (2020), stillness and slowness are revealed as potential points of disruption, as objects of curiosity and bemusement, against the codified rhythms and narrative expectancies of urban flux. Both series involve durational performances of bodily stasis within city contexts. In Tsai's films, the filmmaker's regular collaborator Lee Kang-Sheng – head shaved, eyes down – walks through city spaces (as well as other, more enigmatic interiors) at such an appreciably glacial pace, dressed in the red robes of a Buddhist monk, that scenes become fly-on-the-wall illustrations of and commentaries on the speed and multiplicity of contemporary urban life. In Wang's films, the artist films herself draped in a white sheet, sitting or standing in public space – a park, a street corner, a laundrette – for hours on end, unperturbed by the contingencies unfolding because and independent of her presence. As such, both sets of films function like gallery equivalents of Dom Joly's hidden camera/practical joke series *Trigger Happy TV* (2000-03, 2016-17). One watches in simultaneous awe at the audacity of the gag/performance – its outrageous physicality, its deadpan commitment – and amused and/or fascinated by the responses in passers-by that it provokes. (Joly's most famous gag, incidentally, involved answering and shouting into a giant phone while sat in a cinema, much to the shock and confusion of fellow patrons.) Such works, as Johnny Forever Nawracaj (2016) points out, "perform stillness to provoke critical thought … evoking transness as disruption" (120). Put another way, stillness and slowness amount in certain circumstances to a kind of refusal of norms, a provocation that forces upon those perceiving such qualities to make assumptions, reveal or confront their prejudices, *do* something – even if that something is in turn to walk away.

If the personification of an artistic work forcing something upon or from a spectator is comical, its humour is defined precisely by the assumption *of* a spectator. In Tsai's *Walker*, Wang's *Futility* and Joly's *Trigger Happy TV*, the absurdity and perversity of the performance is underlined as much by those moments in which it does not provoke a reaction as those in which it does. While Nawracaj is right to note the necessity of participation in such works, in that they deploy stillness to call attention "to habitual states of detached collectivity and normative conditions of membership in an audience" (120), I would contend that participation itself is an interpretable and unstable mode. A key strategy here is opacity: eschewing contextual and explicatory devices, the performance advances a humour that is playful and provocative due to its

lack of viewing instructions, the withdrawal of terms by which it might be better understood. There is ambiguity here and there is ambivalence: recall, again, the viewer who admitted to feeling enthralled and frustrated as *Lubiana Laibach* unfolded. In contrast to both the public performance of the hidden-camera prank and many gallery contexts, both of which involve fluctuating degrees of spontaneity, contingency and accidental spectatorship, the cinema is one especially of elective participation. In this space, to screen and encounter a work whose sound and image are untethered from narrative – the prevalence and predominance of which must always be presumed – is to participate in an experience in which the comical and absurd are never far away. Without narrative conventions as a guidance principle, the viewer becomes alert to the experiential simultaneity of the moment in heightened parallel to the onscreen simultaneity of past(s) and present(s).

I was asked about opacity in Sheffield. It is not that I necessarily think an eschewal of extraneous information makes for a more purely cinematic experience, but rather that in real life the commemorative stones at the centre of *Lubiana Laibach* offer little explanation as to their own existence and history. Just as they might invite speculation from the walker – difficult though it is to miss the common inscription of "1942 – 1945", the geometric rendering and diagrammatic stylisation of barbed wire – the film invites the viewer into an active process of interpretation and reconstruction. In this sense, while Ljubljana's Path of Remembrance and Comradeship may belong to a genre of historical commemoration in which "the stone memorial absolved the future generations from the inherited responsibility of preserving the memory of the past" (Aumiller 2017: 21-2), *Lubiana Laibach* articulates a vision of the city's present in which the visual persistence of past traumas instantiates an ontological query into the very functions and uses of commemoration. Put another way, the film observes this memorial in ways that the people within its vicinity do not: in this sense, with each cumulative background detail, the film calls into question the intrinsic challenges that such monuments face in bringing into being an active process of interpretation and reconstruction of the past. The film is both obvious and suggestive in its simultaneity: on the one hand there is the optical layering of images, the active complication of soundscapes, and the tapestry-like structural interlocking and mutual reinforcement of pasts and presents, and on the other hand there is the explanation-free simplicity of the film's title. An exemplification in itself of the film's broader interplays between repetition and difference, and between present-day views of a Slovenian city once occupied by successive fascist states, *Lubiana Laibach*'s title translates in English to "Ljubljana Ljubljana", the first

word being the Italian translation and the second being the German. Not all fascisms are the same: in the equation Lubiana = Laibach, the second is different to the first by virtue that it is second. While the Italian and German armies garrisoned the city to strategise against urban- and rural-dwelling partisans – to conceptualise and impose, that is, a literal division between city and country – the film documents an artistic monument to the overthrow of such divisions: as the film's images and sounds attest, this is a space not only in which memories of occupation and antifascist victory coexist, but also one in which distinctions between the urban and non-urban are blurred.

Coming to terms with the complexity and simplicity of *TEN SKIES*, whose abstractions are also the result of an absolute directness, Balsom writes:

> The demand it makes on its viewer has nothing to do with having specialised knowledge of film or art history. It depends on no theory-driven supplementary text to provide background. It is not an arid conceptual exercise but a direct, phenomenological experience, an invitation to enter into a changed relationship to time, vision and attention, extended with generosity to all comers. (63)

Favouring abstraction, opacity itself generates simultaneity, ambiguity, ambivalence. The significance of this is its political potential: how an aesthetics of simultaneity might grant agency to a viewer-listener in the way that a path-led, destination-oriented dérive liberates the walker to conceive of and engage with space in all its porousness, multiplicity and totality. Screening and encountering such a work in the cinema is consequently a potential challenge and a generous invitation: take it or leave it. While mine is not a socially engaged practice, much less a co-authored one, it does invite and allow for a range of spectatorships, modes of listening, and responses. There are also, however, political limitations to acknowledge here: just as discussions of walking can take for granted a body's ability to walk, so an argument in favour of seeing and exhibiting films in a cinema space can also perpetuate social and political problems to do with access, class, technical perfectionism and urban-centric models of cultural provision. We will return to these limitations in due course.

Chapter 3. All Over the Map: Disruption, Play and Looking in *9 x 45*

> Be patient. Pay attention. The story is already there. Here it comes.
>
> — Amanda Yates (2007: 164)

As things developed, they began to lose shape. As we have seen, both *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach* take their compositional form from pre-existing features repeated within and across two specific urban environments. The architectural difference between the repetitions in question – an overhead structure in one example, a vertical feature in the other – defines the key distinction between the two films not only in terms of their final form but also the methodologies underpinning each production. Encountered as they are, in sequence along a footpath, the eponymous structures of *Lea River Bridges* condition graphic repetition: once one has made the decision to frame and film each bridge from the more or less limited vantage point afforded by the process of passing under it, one has essentially and already committed to the film's final form, with any variations resulting from the function and design of each structure, and from any changes in sonic ambience in accordance with its geographical position and the time of day it was encountered (and, as we have seen, from the editorial decision of when a cut is made). By contrast, the stone monuments of *Lubiana Laibach* emanate upward, from the ground, ranging from around 5 to 6½ feet in height. This architectural difference, between bridge and monument, opens up a range of visual options: even if one commits – as I did – to framing each of the monuments in such a way that they can be presented sequentially without any appreciable difference to their position within the image, each structure still accommodates 360° of choice when it comes to filming it. The bridges in *Lea River Bridges* command the frame in a way that the stone monuments of *Lubiana Laibach* do not: they are literally overbearing. Because they stretch through the z-axis, the bridges constitute foreground, midground and background: they govern perspective in its totality. By contrast, even if the stone monuments of *Lubiana Laibach* can be said to command the frame through their persistent centrality, they are still *distinct and distinguishable from* their surrounding environment. This notion of "surrounding" is spatially significant in the way it dictates cinematic possibilities: put in simple terms, you can walk under or over a bridge, but you cannot circle it.

It is in this sense that *Lubiana Laibach* represents – in comparison to *Lea River Bridges* – a loss of shape, insofar as the architectural features depicted within it were and are less pre-

determinative. This point is also important when considering *9 x 45*, especially within the context of the structural film. In conceiving this third film, I was aware of three unique problems, each of which could and can be understood in terms of formal shape and in relation to the previous two films. The first problem was the pre-existing features at the film's centre, from which it was to take its formal shape. These were neither bridges nor stone monuments, nor were they designed to exist, function or be encountered in the same way. Though there is a sequential logic to how these features can be encountered within their own urban context – for reasons that I will shortly outline – their positioning is not necessitated by social need (as with the bridges, built to satisfy specific infrastructural demands) or a public engagement strategy (as with the monuments, erected to memorialise historical sites that had themselves become cultural markers of identity). The second problem, then, was the scattered nature of the sites in question. This represented, again in relation to the previous two films, a development in terms of spatial strategy, physical achievability and formal shape. If the Lea River's bridges are sequentially encountered along a linear route comprehendible as an A-to-B walk, and the Path of Comradeship and Remembrance manifests in an A-to-A circularity, the sites that inspired *9 x 45* are more geographically scattered. If the first two films were made in response to urban contexts whose repetitions can be understood through variation – and thus contain within them, at least to discerning viewers, the ingredients of a perceived or perceivable journey – I knew *9 x 45* would present a challenge when it came to capturing a sense of distance over time. In very basic terms, one could draw single lines to depict the journeys undertaken for the previous two films – straight down the Lea through East London and a squiggly circumference around the centre of Ljubljana – whereas the locations filmed for *9 x 45* were and are, so to speak, all over the map. Combined, these problems presented a third: how to develop a structure that both spoke to and captured this scatteredness – the geographical specificity of the sites in question – through formal means. If, in completing *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, I had developed an intuition-cum-conviction that duration and rhythm would play an important part in thinking this problem through, the specific nature of this particular urban environment meant that I could not predict the success of the experiment – at least not to the same degree as I could when formalising *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*.

Such problems exemplify the paradox to which I have already alluded. The tension here, intensified across the chronological evolution of the three films, is between the development and deployment of structural methods to capture something (the energy, the essence, the *psychogeography*) of three distinct urban environments, which were themselves encountered

through structural means – the urban walk, the dérive – and the increasing resistance, due to the very character of each respective environment, to structure and shape. This paradox is not so much worthy of discussion as vital to an understanding of the key aims, tenets and limitations of my practice. This chapter will now examine and position *9 x 45* within my wider practice. To properly contextualise the film, it is important to firstly provide some insights into how I first came to encounter its locations: on foot. The broader circumstances that give meaning to a phrase like "on foot" are also worth briefly delineating here, lending as they do a better understanding of my film and walking practice as modes of disturbance and disruption, as playful challenges to the always-on temporality and working conditions of twenty-first-century capitalism. Secondly, I will outline how the project's evolution stemmed from ideas and problems relating to how the artwork to which the film responds structures urban engagement. Thirdly, I will detail the decisions I made in negotiating these problems. Fourthly, I will assess the potential merits and problems of the film on these terms. One measure of the film's structural qualities, as I have argued, is its specific deployment of rhythm and duration; another is its fixed frame. In the latter stages of this chapter, then, I consider the film with reference to my abiding interest as a filmmaker in these strategies, with particular focus on the latter, or what I term – following Iain Sinclair – steady-stare surveillance. In doing so, I situate my practice within a certain cinematic tradition, one that emphasises observation and asserts a politics of looking and listening – an assertion that is itself not without its cultural and political problems.

3.1 Walking (Away) From Work: Privilege and Precarity

Shot on 29 September 2018, *9 x 45* is a video document of *Nine Views* (*Devet pogleda*), a permanent installation by artist Davor Preis in Zagreb, Croatia. Installed across the city in 2004, Preis's artwork was itself conceptualised in response to another: Ivan Kožarić's 1971 sculpture *The Grounded Sun* (*Prizemljeno Sunce*); this latter work is a bronze sphere, around two metres in diameter, representing the star that all bodies within our Solar System orbit. Originally sited outside the Croatian National Theatre, the bronze sphere underwent several relocations prior to 1994, when it was moved to its current location on Bogovićeva Ulica, a pedestrianised street in Zagreb that functions as a central hub of retail, leisure and recreation, attracting locals and tourists alike. Preis devised his own sculptural response to Kožarić's bronze sphere in collaboration with Zagreb's Modern Gallery. Pries' response, *Nine Views*, comprises nine stainless steel orbs, each corresponding to one of the planets that orbits the Sun, located on or

alongside plaques at distinct locales within Zagreb. In keeping with their referential and relational nature – what Olga Majcen (2004) refers to as the installation's "meta-positional game" – Preis's planets are sized and distanced in proportion to *The Grounded Sun*, thus producing a model of the Solar System at a scale of 1:680 million. Just as the actual Earth is 12,742 km in diameter and 151.51 million km from the Sun, Preis's corresponding model is about 1.9 centimetres in size and 225 metres from Kožarić's sphere, while Pluto's model is located 7.7 kilometres from Bogovićeva, in an underpass on Aleja Bologne, the motorway stretching west of the city to its boundary with Zagreb County. That Preis's work takes much of its meaning from Kožarić's might go some way in explaining the relative obscurity of my video homage to it: with no reference to its own intertextuality, the work resists concise explanation. Such resistance is evidenced by any written introduction to *Nine Views* – including my own – which must inevitably and to varying degrees meander from the outset to include reference to Kožarić's artwork.

Summarising how I came to first encounter Preis's installation will help to affirm both its conceptual richness and pertinence within the context of my own practice, structuring as it does a particular engagement with an urban environment, as well as the conceptual problems I have briefly outlined above in devising a film in response to it. My first encounter with *Nine Views* was as a critic and writer, and the second was as a filmmaker; on both occasions, of course, I was also a walker, in the Sinclairian mould, seeking (stalking) ways to find structure and purpose in the urban sprawl. I initially became aware of the work in December 2013, while attending Film Mutations, an annual film festival held inside Kino Tuškanac, one of many impressive soviet-era, single-screen cinemas in the former Yugoslavia. The combination of the festival's specific structure, the ecology of the film festival landscape more broadly, and my own professional and personal circumstances while navigating these is also worth brief consideration here – not out of any anecdotal indulgence but because it both enriches the present positioning of my practice and gives some insight as to how a practice that merges walking and image-making – in a locale that is foreign to the walker, no less – might confirm and challenge common and mostly gendered assumptions around walking as an artistic pursuit (Heddon and Turner 2012: 225-6; Koszerek 2016; Wilkie 2015: 20-1; Morris 2018). Acknowledging at least some of the lived experiences that informed my first encounter with and subsequent interest in *Nine Views*, as a means of mapping one's movements through a city (literally, but also intellectually, emotionally, politically and, yes, psychogeographically), might go some way in addressing and reconciling the

intrinsic tendency of the camera to other, to function anthropologically as an othering device (Fabian 1983), and in line perhaps with mapping's own tendency to facilitate conquest, exploration and navigation within the context of what Pérez Miles and Libersat (2016) call "Western cartographic values, desires and conventions" (342). Such acknowledgements are an important step towards the present chapter's later discussion of steady-stare surveillance and the documentary form – and they might also have important ramifications, beyond the scope of this thesis, in allowing me to confront or understand the pattern of whiteness and maleness across my own creative influences.

In April 2013, I had begun to sign on. Less than a year following the completion of another arts degree – "handsomely equipped to fail", as Oxbridge graduate Nicholas Urfe, the protagonist of John Fowles' 1965 novel *The Magus* wryly put it – I became a recipient of Jobseeker's Allowance, which guaranteed a weekly provision of £66 so long as I was actively seeking employment and willing to learn new skills to broaden my chances thereof. Around the same time, however, I had also begun to attend my first overseas film festivals as a critic – Lisbon in April, Locarno in August, Vienna in October – writing for a blend of online and print publications, some of which were in a position to remunerate me for my services and some of which were not. This latter point is important in ways that are not immediately obvious: I mention it not to lament the financial disparities that define certain cultural tendencies – call them narrative expectancies – towards un(der)paid labour within the arts, but to sketch a portrait of someone who had found themselves in a position simultaneously of privilege and precarity, a simultaneity that underpins the emergence of a particular artistic practice, one dependent upon a physical assertion over landscape on the one hand and in response to the relentless competition and scarcity of money within the freelance gig economy on the other. The privilege, today, might be defined by an ability to see places and encounter peoples in a context and manner that many others are not able to: traveling, within Europe and beyond, from one cultural event to another, with the travel itself often covered by the cultural event in question, and with other perks such as paid-for accommodation, delegate dinners, opportunities for career advancement without a need for recruitment protocols or formal qualifications, and so on. The precarity, by contrast, might be defined by the financial insecurity that often defines such work: while more and more people partake in film criticism, less and less are remunerated for it, and the work itself is freelance, without sick pay, maternity leave, holidays or pension schemes.

Another way of framing this dialectic is to consider the duality of its exclusions. With its unsocial hours, far-flung geographies, lives lived out of a suitcase between short- and long-haul flights, etc, making any kind of living within the globalised film festival landscape tends to be attainable for those without domestic attachments (family, partner/spouse), significant financial commitments (mortgages, extortionate rents) and/or those without chronic illness and/or disabilities. In this sense, film festivals express and perpetuate what Russell and Malhotra highlight as capitalism's intrinsically ableist logics (2002: 212; see also Shi 2020). In the same moment, the post-Fordist, globalised nature of festival work (Farrugia 2019) promotes technology and communication to the forefront of labour production (Hill 2015), so that while festivals are spatiotemporal events (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward: 2016), the people who produce, curate and work for them are increasingly aspatial and atemporal: untethered to a workspace, drifting from one gig to the next, with short-term contracts prescribing a list of deliverables rather than fixed hours and precluded from any long-term security or life-planning. As Mark Fisher (2018) remarks, "the always-on pressure made possible by mobile telecommunications technology means that there is no longer any end to the working day" (501).

As a practising critic, writer, educator and curator who attended an uncommonly high number of film festivals between 2014 and 2018, I experienced some of these conditions first-hand. The work – writing – was underpaid, if it was paid at all, and the precarity of it inscribed in me a sense of overproduction, to the point where it was difficult to know when I was not working and when I was. When not on the road, I lived with my (supportive, working-class) parents in Gateshead: on the one hand, I was living at such a geographical remove from the heavily London-centric film industry that relying on festivals to find work as a critic became something of a necessity, while on the other hand it was by living at such a geographical remove, away from what I understood to be London's extractive landlordism, that I could even opt to attend so many festivals in a calendar year. If my career felt like it was emerging as a kind of lifestyle choice (Pattison 2014c), it was due to the ways in which the work itself blurred life's boundaries, with its networking events, its socials, its round-the-clock tendency to integrate mealtimes (between screenings) and breakfasts (at the hotel) into a never-not-on work ethic, where chance encounters become career opportunities. My advancement into this arena was further facilitated by my personal circumstances: no debts to speak of beyond the vague cloud of a student loan, no dependents, no illnesses or disabilities, and I was of average build and health – a not insignificant fact when considering low-cost airlines' strategic miserliness when it comes to allocating seat-

space, and the potential knock-on mental effects of traveling often in such restrictive conditions. Professionally, I am in no doubt that I also benefited from certain biases, whether institutional or unconscious, that prevail across the sector: I was a young, white male keen to network and mingle, and as an anglophone I had also managed to establish working relationships with several high-profile publications with an international readership – which itself reinforced the never-not-on effect, the work-as-life mode of production, with an ever-increasing pool of editors to whom I could pitch article ideas.

Throughout this period, due to the personal circumstances just mentioned, much of my income was disposable; and yet I had no savings or assets to speak of. I channelled and acknowledged this dichotomy in numerous ways. A meme I made and posted to my social media, which gained traction among peers and colleagues, presented an image of me appearing upbeat and mid-laugh, photographed on a dérive from Rotterdam to Delft, in conscious retreat from the former city's film festival and heading towards the town where I knew Werner Herzog had shot *Nosferatu* with Klaus Kinski in 1979; over the image were the words *WRITES ON HOW TO MAKE IT AS A FILM CRITIC / HAS LESS THAN £45 IN BANK ACCOUNT*. In a written account of another dérive, in Lisbon while attending the film festival IndieLisboa, I remarked: "One of the ongoing contradictions of being a 26-year-old film journalist from Gateshead is that you're enviably footloose on the one hand and enviously cash-strapped on the other" (Pattison 2014b). More formally, I was able to articulate these and other anxieties in a 2016 interview for the print edition of the Polish magazine *Press*, in 2016:

> It can be difficult to switch off. […] I'm constantly wondering how I can monetise my experience. Sitting through a boring film, my mind will wander: "How can I turn this monotony into money?" There's always an incentive to attend a film festival if the invitation's there, though, because a large part of your momentum as a freelance journalist depends on being seen at a place. I guess it's nice to have your absence perceived as abnormal, rather than the other way around. Plus there's always a vague, perhaps paranoid, fear that if I decline an invitation I'll never receive another. In the beginning, I said yes to everything. Who wouldn't? (Pattison 2016b)

It is against this backdrop that, defined by my own market-dependency and consequent need to constantly produce work, my active interest in the walk emerged. It took root in Lisbon, and later developed at festivals in Seville, Vienna and in Prizren, where the festival was either (in the case of Lisbon and Seville) structured so that all screenings and events took place in the evening, leaving my daytimes free, or (in the case of Vienna and Prizren) long enough in duration

that I could factor in some days exploring the city away from professional demands. While in many respects I embodied what Blake Morris (2018) calls "the white, able-bodied, male who drops his everyday relationships to engage in epic journeys", the walks assumed an urgency that felt in obvious ways bodily, in less obvious ways social, and in very gradual ways political – a conscious rejection, however individualistic and self-serving, of the workplace demands of post-Fordism, which had rendered me aspatial and atemporal. Put another way, I was a product and symptom of twenty-first-century capitalism's deterritorialisation of the workplace, a historical juncture in which, as David Archibald and Carl Lavery observe, "all distinctions between private space and public space have been collapsed, [in which] there is simply no escape from labour time. There is always a drive to work" (112). I should here also reiterate that my primary interest has been in what Archibald and Lavery (2018) term "the possibilities afforded by disruption and interruption" (112), rather than positioning walking as a necessarily or consciously oppositional act. To commit this latter error would only perpetuate the same old ableist logics just mentioned, placing impossibly political expectations upon those not able to walk, or indeed upon those for whom bipedalism is often not a matter of choice: homeless people, inner-city commuters, human billboards, drawers of water, sex workers – at least some of which were thought by Walter Benjamin to have shared common political ground, as loiterers, with the flaneur (see Buck-Morss 1986: 99).

Nevertheless, walking did feel for me like a legitimate form of disruption, of reinstating a spatialised temporality: an embodied, embryonic form of an automated "out-of-office" email. This was no doubt further amplified at the time by my lack of smartphone (acquiring my first smartphone in June 2017 felt like a reluctant throwing in of the towel, an opportunity presented as defeat and vice versa; and indeed my work-life boundaries since that moment have dissolved to an almost comical degree). Inducing its own rhythms, walking was rooted for me to the bricks and mortar of a city; not coincidentally, my drifts also often took me away from the festival centre, a hub of high-brow cultural activity, the space in which colleagues were also competitors and every living moment presented itself as an opportunity to monetise, exploit (and be exploited), pitch to some editor in a different, far-off time-zone. In this context, walking functioned as a disruption to the unrelenting demands of freelance labour, extractive capitalism and the professional anxieties and petty jealousies conditioned and produced by them. Walking to a city's peripheries, or to some lesser-known location or self-prescribed site of interest within it, resulted in a sense of achievement that was spiritual as much as it was physical. Put in

professional and psychic terms, walking made my presence at a festival feel physically meaningful and mentally sustainable, and it even helped me to distinguish myself professionally within a field overdetermined by the always-on atemporality of work under capitalism. I confess to feelings of quiet elation, even vindication, when local colleagues expressed bemusement upon learning that I had actively sought some hardly-known edgelands monument on foot, or had opted against the U-Bahn in favour of walking from one cinema-screening in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz to another several miles away on Karl Marx-Allee (Pattison 2014c). In Palm Springs, attending the fifth edition of American Documentary Film Festival, I walked for sixty minutes in the heat of California's Palm Desert, moving in the shape of a giant L across the city grid from hotel to cinema – opting to awkwardly decline the car and chauffeur promised to all visiting delegates.

In a context such as this, walking assumed the kind of resistance suggested by artist Francis Alÿs (in Ferguson 2007), as "a very immediate method for unfolding stories" (63). Just as festivals affirm themselves as spatio-temporal occurrences, with public events often unfolding in parallel at different venues across a city, walking between spaces (in a city like Berlin or Palm Springs) or away from the festival hangout altogether (in a city like Lisbon or Prizren) poses a playful challenge to the ways in which such events dictate and delimit movement and labour. The presence of play here is important: as a white, able-bodied male of 6'1" height and average build, I was able to leverage my own appearance and physicality to playfully subvert and reject the modes of consumption and production expected of me. Indeed, it might be argued that it is these very physical traits that allowed a sense of play, even frivolity, into my Sinclairian stalk: whereas a combination of other physical traits and lived experiences might result for someone else in heightened fear and/or severe discomfort and/or harassment, assault or arrest, my walks were playful in the sense articulated by Adetty Pérez Miles and Julie U. Libersat (2018), creating "a framework for getting lost", in which the lostness accommodates "a state of fluidity and flexibility, which invites disorientation and its constant process of (re) orientation" (342). In this sense, as Silvan Tomkins (in Demos 1995) puts it, play can be regarded as an end in itself (170), whereby the completion of a dérive provides its own reward (Pink 2011: 3).

The walk resulting in both my first encounter with Preis's *Nine Views* and the film *9 x 45* speaks to these contexts. On the evening of 7 December 2013, while attending Film Mutations, a small and intimate event that billed itself as a "festival of invisible cinema", I set off with Neil Young, a fellow critic and friend, to wander the streets of Zagreb. As my published account of

our jaunt admits, the walk began as a practical task – to exploit the wintry Balkan temperatures and knock the cobwebs off a daylong hangover (Pattison 2013). On Bogovićeva Ulica, in visible distance from Ivan Kožarić's *Grounded Sun*, there is a sculpture of a dog, engraved into the side of an exterior wall of the Oktogon, an octagonal building constructed in 1899 as the first Croatian National Savings Bank. The dog, as a plaque beneath the sculpture explains, safeguarded the site and was informally adopted by construction workers before being killed one night by a burglar. Its name: *Pluto*. Might this coincidence be exploited; might the canine's memorial be an appropriate departure point for a spontaneous attempt to find the other Pluto, Preis's model planet, whose existence Neil had discovered through a cursory Google search for sites of potential interest prior to our arrival in Zagreb? That the planet was the only one of Preis's nine not to have its exact location listed online announced itself as a challenge. A walk from Pluto the dog to Pluto the planet, one sited very much within Zagreb's bustle and the other apparently found in an underpass on a motorway seven kilometres away, had enough structure, enough serendipity, for the concept to appeal. That the festival we were playing truant from happened to be honouring Guy Debord's films further affirmed the evening's sense of providence. In fact, embodying the playfulness of the Sinclairian stalk, we had intuited that the palindromic title of Debord's final film, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978), which we had watched at the festival earlier that week, shared certain commonalities, certain symmetries, with a walk from one Pluto to another Pluto: and back.[1]

If the route itself was straightforward, we anticipated that the size of the model planet might produce problems: what did the underpass look like and how small was the Pluto for which we were looking? Afterwards, I wrote:

> As the hours passed and we headed further and further out of the city, a casual stroll took the shape of some crazed military mission, of some ill-advised pilgrimage. Our meandering conversation would gradually become consumed by an obsession with the elusive orb. The journey began at around half-four in the evening. It ended at around half-ten. (Pattison 2013)

As this passage from my written account at the time attests, the walk opened up new temporalities, distinct from and in contrast to those encouraged and imposed by a film festival, whose own temporal delimitations can often double as a way of disciplining itineraries and

[1] For an account of Zagreb from another idiosyncratic perspective, one that draws out its mathematical consistencies with references to its many octagons as well as to Preis's *Nine Views*, see Dakić and Kolarec (2018).

therefore labour. The walk was structured and structuring, producing its own terms, rhythms, spontaneities and experiences from which to develop embodied forms of knowledge. From that moment, as with my walks along the River Lea and around Ljubljana's Path of Comradeship and Remembrance, I had an urge to make something of Preis's installation, about the ways in which it might be used as a kind of alternative navigational tool, a means by which to constellate a palimpsest over the thoroughfares and transport routes that defined and coded mobilities and temporalities within Zagreb. I wanted to map this alluring city and I had found the structuring device with which to do it.

3.2 Play: Rules and Numbers

Designed to scale, the planets of *Nine Views* are encountered at exponentially distanced intervals. If a single, sequenced walk encompassing all of Preis's planets were to be structured according to the real-world Solar System – proceeding that is from the planet closest to Kožarić's *Grounded Sun* to the planet furthest from it – then the first four models (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars) would be found with relative ease, each seemingly around the corner from the others. The challenge, if we might term it as such, begins with Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto. While a checklist of the four planets closest to *The Grounded Sun* encompasses less than a mile and can be completed on foot in less than 20 minutes, it takes me around 30 minutes to walk the 1½ miles from Mars to Jupiter alone, and another 18 minutes to complete the next mile to Saturn. The exponential increase in distance is most appreciable hereafter: to Neptune from Saturn it is, whichever route you take, at least three miles (for me, around an hour's walk); from Neptune to Uranus it is at least five miles (around 100 minutes); and from Uranus to Pluto it is at least seven miles (2 hours 20 minutes). These bracketed times, of course, do not factor in the cumulative effect of walking such distances, when one's feet and hips turn sore and the march increasingly feels like a trudge. From a walker's perspective, then, the siting of Preis's planets takes on an almost perverse quality in its resistance to what might be considered a navigable sequence: unlike a child's wallchart of the Solar System, which might for illustrative purposes show all nine (now eight) planets in a straight line, *Nine Views* positions its model orbs in such a way that a single day's conquest becomes daunting. These metal spheres are demonstrably neither bridges along a river nor stone monuments along a path: indeed, the psychological challenge – and appeal – of completing all nine planets in a single attempt is compounded by their scatteredness, the feeling that one is being pulled east, then south, then west, sometimes retracing steps and at the mercy of

the unmoving planets' stubborn, gravitational draw. Pluto is further from Uranus than it is from *The Grounded Sun* – again, whichever route one takes.

The repetition of this latter phrase is intentional. The spatial ambiguities implied by the whichever-route-ness of Preis's *Nine Views* raises a key point when considering my video homage to it, namely its relationship to the structural and the sequential – two interrelated properties that I had explored in making both *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, and which I thought I was continuing with *9 x 45*. Whereas the other two films were shot along a linear path, a singular route that I had to walk in order to encounter the recurrent features along it, *9 x 45* was shot in response to an urban landscape that accommodates choice: the route I take from Neptune to Uranus is potentially different to the route someone else might. That this conceptual problem did not reveal itself until much later in the filmmaking process further affirms the playfulness of *Nine Views* as well as its relative resistance to cinematic adaptation – at least along the lines by which I wished to adapt it. In other words, although each of the three films in this thesis focuses on a particular recurrent motif across a walkable route, the route itself is prescribed in only two of them. In *9 x 45*, the scattered nature of the route calls to mind Paul Klee's reference to such destinations being "more like a series of appointments than a walk" (in Ingold 2016: 75). If I *did* come close to identifying this problem at the outset, however, the figurative lens with which I did so was somewhat refractive. I thought the problem, in attempting to translate Preis's installation into a structural film, was merely to do with distance and scatteredness, that it was positional rather than relational. I saw objects rather than the ways in which they were connected, model planets rather than the routes traced between them. Discussing the problem as I had originally identified it – in terms of the scatteredness of my destinations and their exponential distance from the starting point – will at least allow me, nevertheless, to contextualise how I went about making the film that I did, before returning to and considering the ways in which the final work departs from the formal structures I had developed in producing *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*.

That Kožarić's *Sun* is located in Zagreb's city centre means that the exponential distances covered when engaging with *Nine Views* in its totality become measures of remoteness, of peripherality. The surrounding environs of each successive orb can be intuited, through the kind of architectures and infrastructures one encounters in travelling to it, as further away from the city's centre than the previous orb. In this way *Nine Views* structures an escalation, or one might say de-escalation, away from the intensified hubbub of Zagreb's centre – to and through the city's suburban neighbourhoods and, finally, to the non-space motorways that accommodate

movement into and out of the city. This progression, from centre to suburb to non-space, was apparent on 7 December 2013, when I first walked to Pluto: the way in which, when walking west on Ilica, and then onto Aleja Bologne, global brands and fashion outlets give way to convenience stores, in which bus stops grow more and more infrequent, in which petrol stations, train stations and industrial sites become more frequent, in which there is eventually little else but the cacophony of cars rushing by to their own rhythmic throbs. In short, human activity drops off, and one is no longer among or within the crowds, but a sole presence whose solitariness is amplified by the loud roar of traffic and the regular sight of buses covering long distances; unfolding at a human's pace, one's wayfaring is made distinct from the comparatively rapid transit and destination-oriented locomotion of public transport and passing cars (see Ingold 2016: 79). Whereas *Lea River Bridges* followed a route in more or less unchanging proximity to an urban centre, and *Lubiana Laibach*'s route traversed radically different environs only to come full circle, the route undertaken for this film would approximate and symbolise some kind of exit strategy: to Pluto, the literal conclusion of the walk that in many respects gave birth to this thesis, and representative of some symbolic outer rim.

In making a film in response to *Nine Views*, I posed myself three challenges. The first was to give each of Preis's planets its due, to apply what had felt like the structural film's democratising instinct when making *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, in which the size or character of each distinct locale had no bearing on the screen-time I allocated to it. While this challenge was certainly a continuation of the strategy adopted for the previous two films – capturing difference through repetition – it was made new by the fact that Preis's planets varied in both size and height. With some affixed, above head-height, to a wall so as to protrude out from it, and others sitting atop a wall below head-height, the totality of the installation did not lend itself so immediately to a predetermined narrative or compositional structure – or, as just mentioned, to a predetermined walking route. Related to this, the second challenge I posed myself was to somehow capture the spatial shifts I have also just mentioned; to simultaneously evoke, that is, the exponential sense of peripherality felt when undertaking a sequential engagement with *Nine Views* as well as the ways in which the installation itself constructs and provokes an embodied understanding of the city's shifts in ambience. The problem here was less the differences in size across the model planets than the aforementioned scatteredness of the route: with few(er) constants to call attention to from one scene to another (such as a river, or the totalising perspective of a bridge, or the ostensible identicality of stone monuments along a

footpath), how might one capture the sense of distance, exponential or otherwise, as one drifts away from the centre? Finally, alert to the increase in duration between *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, from 34 to 63 minutes, as well as the palpable ways in which the latter film extended and furthered my explorations of stillness and slowness established by the former film, I set myself a third challenge: to make a film that was shorter than the previous two films, and to investigate if a film could convey duration without merely being what is commonly understood as *durational*; if it could capture a sense of distance, of time, without relying solely on the extended, uninterrupted take.

My solution was thus. As its title suggests, *9 x 45* consists of nine sequences of equal duration amounting to 45 shots: one sequence per planet. Each sequence is 90 seconds in length, to satisfy my first desire: giving each planet its due. However, to approximate the aforementioned shifts encountered across the walk, from busy urban centre to peripheral outer rim, I decided that each sequence would contain one less shot than the sequence preceding it, while adhering to the overall duration of the sequence; so that if the first sequence (Mercury) had nine shots amounting to a 90-second sequence, the second (Venus) would have eight shots amounting to a 90-second sequence, while the third (Earth) would contain seven; and so on, until you were left with Neptune's three shots across 90 seconds, Uranus' two shots across 90 seconds, and then a single, uninterrupted take of Pluto lasting 90 seconds. So that the exponential distance might be more effectively conveyed, I extended this mathematical consistency to the duration of shots within each sequence: while the nine shots in the Mercury sequence last 10 seconds each (because if nine shots in a 90-second sequence must all have the same duration, they last 10 seconds each), the two shots in the Uranus sequence last 45 seconds each.

While such principles might appear relatively arbitrary – more so than, say, the rationale by which I arrived at the 45-second duration of *Lea River Bridges*' shots – they also function as another expression of the map's scatteredness. Like the route taken to reach each planet, the rules underpinning *9 x 45* reveal a subjective authorship that is nevertheless tied to objective data. In other words, if *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach* can be understood respectively as engagements with and meditations upon how a city's infrastructure is both organised and organising, and how another city's collective memorialisation of its own past can be viewed and evoked through a present-day lens, my creative autonomy in making *9 x 45* was in active dialogue with that of two other individual artists: Ivan Kožarić and Davor Preis. In this context, the film may be viewed as a work of critique, advancing as it does an engagement with and

understanding of these pre-existing artworks – directly in the case of Preis's, indirectly in the case of Kožarić's. *9 x 45* pays playful homage to *Nine Views* like James Benning's *casting a glance* (2007) does *Spiral Jetty*, Robert Smithson's 1970 sculptural earthwork on the northeast shore of Great Salt Lake.

My intention, at any rate, was to evoke the exponential increase in distance of each new location not by spending more overall time there but by firstly allocating less individual vantage points and secondly increasing the screen-time of those vantage points, so that each sequence might *seem* or *feel* slower and/or longer than the ones preceding it, just as a walk from Neptune to Uranus *is* longer than the one from Saturn to Neptune. Committing to this editorial pattern returned me to what I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to rhythm, duration, repetition and perception. While the rhythmic difference between a 90-second sequence containing nine shots of equal duration and a 90-second sequence containing two shots of equal duration may be immediately perceived, the difference between a 90-second sequence containing nine shots of equal duration and a 90-second sequence containing eight shots of equal duration is very likely not perceived – the difference being nine 10-second shots and eight 11.25-second shots – *unless* one was primed beforehand and ready with a stopwatch and counter. As seen in figure 7, the increase in shot durations from one sequence to the next is itself exponential:

Sequence (90 seconds)	**Number of shots**	**Shot length (seconds)**	**Increase in shot length from previous sequence (seconds)**
Mercury	9	10	n/a
Venus	8	11.25	1.25
Mars	7	12.86	1.61
Earth	6	15	2.14
Jupiter	5	18	3
Saturn	4	22.5	4.5
Neptune	3	30	7.5
Uranus	2	45	15
Pluto	1	90	45

***Figure 7. Decreasing the number of shots and increasing the shot lengths in* 9 x 45**

When presented in this way, the perceivable and imperceivable changes in the film are better understood – as are the relationships between rhythm, perception, repetition and duration. Much like *Lubiana Laibach*, whose durational dissolves have produced in many viewers a curiosity as to *what* is happening onscreen as well as *how* the film was made, *9 x 45* deploys the puzzle-implying mode of the structural film. I was once again, here, interested in that moment in the film-viewing process where one might realise a change is happening when the change, in fact, *has already happened*. Even if one were to go back and watch the film again, perhaps to perceive or better understand the moment of change, the repeated viewing would in some ways be a new one, coloured and informed by assumptions not possible first time around. This moment thus contains within it, for the viewer, a discovery of the film's perceptual play and therefore an awareness of the film-watching process itself in durational, intellectual and rhythmic terms – what Chen (2013) calls the "ethical tenet" of the structural film, whereby "the viewer becomes attentive to the unfolding of a phenomenon as he or she makes sense of his or her own sensual-cognitive development in the duration of viewing" (537). Key to this sensual-cognitive development is the fact that it can occur and unfold even before and despite one's precise understanding of how the puzzle functions or indeed how it is solved: the chief point is that the durational persistence of, say, the two shots in the Uranus sequence is experienced, felt and understood in retroactive relation, say, to the eight shots encompassing Venus or seven encompassing Earth. One *intuits* a shift – even if its expression is fidgetiness, boredom, puzzlement – before one realises what has taken place. As in James Benning's work, as Daniele Rugo (2018) suggests, "what is important is not whether the subject apprehends the object accurately, but what affective traces the encounter produces… The truth of the works is the interest in the world that they elicit" (167).

It is in this sense that *9 x 45* expands and adapts the playful qualities, the meta-positional game, of Preis's work. Much like *Nine Views*, my film advances – however obscurely – a form of urban engagement that might itself challenge what is meant by a term like "busy" in relation to a city centre, or indeed why drifting *away* from an urban centre might be considered as a "de-escalation". It is here that we should acknowledge how my language in describing the shifts in the film have tended in this chapter to privilege common assumptions regarding urban space, where busyness is often determined by the presence and density of people – not the architectural evidence or infrastructural traces of human activity, but actual moving organisms. In retaining the

overall length of its nine sequences and making the shots in each respective sequence a little longer by reducing the number of shots by one each time, the film can be understood as a challenge to such people-oriented and urban-centric assumptions. In other words, the longer the shot, the less people appear in it. While the film becomes appreciably and rhythmically slower as it progresses through its nine sequences – mimicking the rhythmic shifts encountered in moving from urban centre to periphery – the increasing duration of each shot affords more time for the viewer's gaze to explore and perhaps for their mind to wander. It is as if to suggest that, while there may at first glance be less happening in the traditional sense at each new location, each new vantage point demands more of one's time and energy. This point has important ramifications, in terms of spending time in, of looking at, and of listening to an environment; as James Benning's tongue-in-cheek and oft-quoted summary of this sentiment goes, "Paying attention can lead to many things. Perhaps even a better government" (in MacDonald 2009: 165). Furthermore, as films such as Benning's own *Sogobi* (2001), Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Ruins* (2011), and Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa's *Promised Lands* (2018) suggest, it is not only regardless of which human activity is visible at a given location, but also *because* of the location's ostensible lack of human activity, that looking and listening can take place there as conscious and urgent actions. To spend the same amount of time at a kerbside in an underpass on Aleja Bologne as by a city-centre marketspace seems to me like the truest duty of any psychogeographic undertaking. It is, through decisions that are both formal and structural, to imbue that location with a potential value – or rather to place upon it the same narrative expectancy that I discussed in relation to *Lea River Bridges*. It is to evoke a space as potent, serendipitous, imaginative, speculative: in a word, incomplete. In the context of what Fisher termed capitalist realism, in which alternative futures are assumed to be no longer possible, evoking space as incomplete becomes a potentially radical gesture.

As such, the camera functions here not merely as mediator but as discipliner: it is itself a structuring apparatus, delimiting and presenting a vantage point from which others might experience, understand and map a particular geography. As Michael Pisaro (2007) notes, "We live in a world in which layers upon layers of things happen… We know this, but we are seldom made conscious of it. We need the discipline of the recording device, of the frame, and especially of the person recording, to make us reinvestigate what we are living in and through" (235). In more phenomenological terms, the camera functions as a device by and through which we may continue to grasp the elusive and intangible. The camera makes visible the ways in which our

world in motion *moves*. Jordan Schonig (2018) points to cinema's unique capacity not only to produce and reproduce lifelike representations of motion but also the way in which it makes it possible for an experience of otherwise elusive phenomena to be repeated and measured. Schonig takes Kant's examples of fire and water and adds to these cigarette smoke – whose respective flickers, ripples and billowing curls bear no discernible beginning or end and no shape or form to speak of in concrete terms. It is through their cinematographic capturing, Schonig argues, that these phenomena acquire a permanence, repeatability and measurability: "cinema naturally converts formless motion into a spatiotemporally bound object by isolating a single point of view and inscribing the temporal flux of movement. Simply put, cinematic images of contingent motion are rendered astonishing by exhibiting *framed* perceptions of them" (37; emphasis in original).

As should by now be clear, however, my practice depends not merely on the fixed-frame vantage point, nor merely on what Schonig refers to as "cinema's effortless inscription of such unplannable, unreproducible micromovements" (ibid). Each of the films in this thesis advances a notion of the structural as sequential, as unfolding to varyingly explicit degrees as a *sequence* of vantage points. In keeping with and attempting to approximate the playful nature of Preis's *Nine Views*, *9 x 45* presents a sequence that in some way speaks to the changing rhythms of the urban space one encounters in producing it. The film in this sense is a document of its own production, and so in some ways is limited in its function to the recording of ambiences and occurrences in Zagreb on 29 September 2018. Seen as such, the film is invitational rather than prescriptive. On the one hand, in its increasing promotion of the long take, the film could be seen as a way of decentring the technological attentions, energies and resources that are commonly and disproportionately afforded to the urban centre (see MacDonald 2007: 231), suggesting that more interesting things, or at least just as interesting things, are happening elsewhere and away from that centre – in the quiet suburbs outside of it, for instance, or in the underpasses of its multi-carriage transit routes. This invitational-not-prescriptive mode is enhanced by the film's opening contextual information, which describes the focus of the film without revealing any concrete findings or even reasons as to why it has been made. In this sense, *9 x 45* adapts and affirms the ways in which Preis's installation can itself be considered structural/structuring along lines not dissimilar to the films of James Benning, in which Felicity Colman (2018) notes "no instructional, deterministic or perceptual models for reading are provided" (115).

In the way it remains open to interpretation, to different potentialities, *9 x 45* reproduces in video form the radical and invitational concept of *Nine Views*. Just as my initial trek to find Pluto in 2013 presented itself as a means of disrupting the spatiotemporal limitations and narrative expectancies of freelance labour under capitalism – reconnecting me as it did to a bricks-and-mortar city that I could actively engage with and intervene upon – *9 x 45* can be seen as an invitation to look at, listen to and spend time in a set of urban spaces in a way that is potentially disruptive to the limitations and expectancies resulting from how those spaces are arranged. The invitation should here be understood in distinction from the instruction: to follow Colman's argument, a perceptual model for reading the city is suggested, teased at, rather than provided or prescribed. The game-like properties of Preis's installation, which become apparent when one sets out on foot to find one of the planets without prior knowledge as to how big or where precisely it is, further highlight this dynamic. Such properties are translated here to a series of scenes constructed to emphasise some of the qualities that underpin play: serendipity, speculation, chance, uncertainty, futility, memory, and the lurking possibility of failure.

As such, both *Nine Views* and *9 x 45* adapt and negotiate what Johan Huizinga (1955) posits as the fundamental tension of play, between a "voluntary activity or occupation executed" on one hand and "rules [that are] freely accepted" (28) on the other. To seek out Preis's planets is to volunteer into the playful activity of walking, stalking, drifting, wandering, searching – a game in which the delimiting structures and frustrations of Zagreb's streets must always be adhered to and understood. The variations and anticipations resulting from this tension contain and create their own narrative expectancy. Where some of Preis's model planets might be less immediately noticeable within their environment than others, I have chosen to delay their appearance in the corresponding video sequence and/or make their position within the video frame less obvious. While the plaques accompanying Preis's models contain nothing but the name of the planet and figures relating to the diameter of its real-world namesake and its estimated distance from the Sun, my sequences begin with the earthly coordinates of Preis's models. There are in-jokes *between* sequences, too: after the first sequence establishes Preis's Mercury as its point of interest, the second sequence follows with a title card referring to Venus, in logical arrangement, only to open with a shot of Pluto – the *dog* – which is located within the vicinity of the sequence's eponymous planet. Likewise, the Earth sequence includes a shot of a storefront named Mercury. These intratextual references not only respect and amplify the obscurity of the artwork they homage. They also highlight the important role that play performs in psychogeography,

which constructs its own rules while rejecting others to unlock and open up the city as well as the walker to an almost-constant process of reinterpretation and mental construction. It is in this context that the apparent arbitrariness of rules, established at the outset, both intensify the undertaking's playfulness and ensure its radical subjectivity.

***Figure 8. The possibility of failure: searching for Uranus in* 9 x 45**

Furthermore, by establishing one of Preis's model planets as the (sometimes immediate, sometimes eventual) point of attention in each sequence, and by establishing in turn a narrative expectancy around that point of attention, *9 x 45* reiterates *Nine Views*' invitational mode. The film invites, by means of its sequential arrangement, a way of looking and listening that is active precisely because its purpose or narrative value is not immediately clear – because, that is, it instantiates a mode of engagement that is underpinned by serendipity, speculation, chance, uncertainty, futility, memory and, yes, the possibility of failure. Another way of approaching this mode of looking is to imagine the viewer, with each new sequence, searching within the film-frame to spot the planet – a game made possible by the fact that the planet is often not in the frame at all, and sometimes not obviously spottable, while at other points it is filmed in such a way that it is unmissable. If this game is predicated upon the act of looking, it is enhanced by certain architectural and compositional repetitions, which afford me as filmmaker the range of choices and variations upon which narrative expectancies and their subversion rely.

This dynamic plays out perhaps most explicitly towards the end of the film, in the three-shot sequence of Uranus, the two-shot sequence of Neptune, and the single-shot sequence of Pluto – all of which appear late enough for the invitational game to have taken hold, or for its general principles to have been established and perhaps electively entered into. While all three shots in the first of these sequences were, like all other sequences, captured within the same general vicinity as one another, the first is of an underpass located a short walk away from Preis's model of Uranus. Consequently, the shot itself does not contain the model planet anywhere within it. This latter fact, of course, is likely not known to the viewer, who, primed and trained by the preceding sequences to expect the appearance at some point of another steel orb, might have begun to participate in the game-like process of searching for it. The composition of this shot, with the camera positioned at the far end of the underpass looking along the entire length of it, may also function simultaneously as a distraction from and enhancement of the viewer's searching gaze, provoking as it does a secondary expectancy around the person walking through the frame away from camera. Recalling the durational and compositional interplay of *Lea River Bridges*, which also adopted a central linear perspective, this shot of the underpass complicates and heightens any search for Uranus within the frame due to a combination of incidental action (a human figure proceeding through the frame) and its time-limited nature. As with any game of looking, perspective plays a key role, and the durational component of the moving image lends a temporal urgency: spot the planet, or at least glean and digest what you can from this scene, in

the knowledge that it might be cut short at any moment. When the composition of this shot is repeated in a dramatically different setting in the next shot, as seen in figure 8, with a row of garages graphically replacing the interior walls of the underpass, the trick is revealed: upon noticing the steel orb to the side of this second image, the viewer arrives at the retroactive realisation that their search for Uranus in the preceding shot was futile. A third shot centres on the planet itself, as if to punctuate the idea that, once the planet is spotted, it cannot be unseen.

This same strategy plays out in the Neptune sequence, in which this time both shots were captured within visible distance of one another along a single street. The first shot in this sequence, of a derelict domestic structure, again does not include Preis's model of Neptune at all, and again the viewer is not to know this and could therefore spend the 45-second duration of the shot searching the frame for it – as indeed the walker may do when arriving at the street in question without knowing the planet's precise location. The second shot is a wider view of the same street from a different angle, which includes the lamppost to which Neptune is attached; the viewer, having by now developed an understanding of the film, may or may not spot the planet during the 45 seconds of screen-time allocated to this particular shot, and their task is again possibly complicated by the incidental motion and action of a van undertaking a manoeuvre in the background of the scene. Unlike the preceding sequence, in which Preis's model of Uranus is firstly not visible, then spottable, then unmissable, the Neptune sequence, limited to two shots, does not grant the viewer an opportunity to see the planet in a way that is unmistakable; if the steel orb is not noticed, the cut to black brings one's search for it to an abrupt and unresolved end. Again, the time-based nature of the medium imbues this game of looking with a sense of playful urgency.

That the film's final sequence is a single 90-second take stretches this durational-compositional interplay, within the confines of the film's structure, to its limit. Likely unaware even at this point of the film's precise and overall editorial pattern, the viewer's search for Pluto must inevitably play out in constant tension with the uncertainty of how long the shot will last. As in *Lea River Bridges*, the fixed rigidity of the frame is made more appreciable here by the unrelenting flow of two-way traffic through it, with the viewer left to speculate as to how long the shot will last. Indeed, if the viewer finds it unsurprising that Pluto constitutes the final sequence in a film that has thus far proceeded through the Solar System's other eight planets, its final uncertainties, its final narrative expectancies, are to do with the duration of the shot. Without any tangible logic as to why, when and how the film will end, such uncertainties imbue

this final shot with an unexpected tension. Is the small plaque-like rectangle discernible on the left-hand column within the frame the sculpture that we seek? Is there to be another vantage point from which to test our perceptual apparatus? If the answer to the second question is no – if, that is, the film concludes with a cut to black, then how do we resolve the speculations underpinning the first question? In its suspension of closure, the final shot of *9 x 45* destabilises any distinction between what is incidental and a point of interest. In establishing such tensions only to refuse solving them, the film promotes looking as an ultimately and joyously ambiguous act: we are left, suspended, with what Rugo (2018) calls "the impossibility of demarcating the eventful from the uneventful" (162). Looking is also, as I will now argue, the chief and enduring prerogative of the cinematic tradition to which this thesis contributes.

3.3 Blurred Lines: Looking, Searching, Finding

In its unique indexicality, its reliance on light and trace, the photographic image – as mentioned at the outset of this text – can be thought of as being of this world. And in the prejudice that it must inevitably and to varying degrees exercise, embodied in the choice(s) made between what is in the frame and what is not in the frame, the photographic image can also be thought of as an intervention upon the world. If this fundamental tension can be understood in technological terms, whereby the production of an image is explicable merely by means of a scientific and technical process, it must also be understood in social and historical terms: to desire and to construct an image is to enter, consciously or otherwise, into a system and context in which political power is shaped, configured, extracted, controlled, distributed, defined, desired, enhanced, circulated, fought for. Put another way, a subjective image – or an image expressing a subjective viewpoint, a lived experience – contributes, once made, to an objective picture that itself shapes and delimits further subjectivities. In its simultaneously discriminate and indiscriminate capturing of the world, image-making is thus a matter – always – of consequence.

As Kevin Coleman and Daniel James (2021) have demonstrated, it is not difficult to trace the emergence, between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, of a mechanical gaze against a new mode of analysis that focused on the systemic inequality, exclusion and violence of the capitalist economy (1). At the same time, due to the very ways in which capitalism constructs, perpetuates and relies on a system of images that is racialised, gendered, ableist, homophobic, class-prejudiced, etc, the mechanical gaze has often been taught and accepted as the work of individual ingenuity (Azoulay 2021: 27), expressive of, understood as and situatable within a

broadly homogeneous – i.e., white supremacist – ideology and practice. This is not so much to deny the photographic image an anti-capitalist remit – or to condemn its function to the mere reproduction of systemic inequalities. It is rather to emphasise the uncertainty, contingency and potentiality contained within and expressed by a photographic image. The very definitional compulsion of capitalism to construct identities through division and power ensures and produces the intrinsic violence of the photographic image: who gets to photograph and who or what is photographed are determined by a system in which modes of circulation are standardised, methods of consumption are assumed, and power and vulnerability are necessarily in dialectical tension. As Coleman and James contend:

> Photography – with its claim to the juridical, evidentiary, disclosive – has been used not only to standardise production and synchronise heterogenous worlds into the homogenising state and the global market, but also in attempts to expand human freedom and halt ecological violence. Actually existing photography, like actually existing capitalisms, is part of a broader range of image practices. (4)

Produced within this context, then, images are weaponizable as well as weapons. If their uncertainty, contingency and potentiality have been problematised by capitalism's neoliberal phase, with its tendency to make more subtle the strategies of division, extraction, co-option and appropriation that underpin capital (Michaels 2021: 101), they are also further intensified by the sequential mode of film, which not only assigns and ascribes durational values to images but also produces social meaning, political power and narrative cohesion through their juxtaposition. In addition, due to the close historical relationship between the material properties of the photographic image and its indexical trace of what is commonly referred to as the incidental and ephemeral, cinematic and photographic contingencies are often read in the same light, with the former's attention to and capacity to record motion accepted as an intensification of the fleeting photographic moment (Schonig 2018; Barthes 1981; Doane 2002 and 2003; Harbord 2007).

While the films in the present thesis do not deploy or contribute to conventional narrative modes, my discussion of their structural and sequential characteristics positions them within a sociohistorical context that might be understood very broadly as anti-capitalist. My films advance and invite a mode of consumption and spectatorship that challenges standardised assumptions, in the same way that walking through an urban environment in a particular way might challenge or reject the routines and rhythms that said environment's spatiotemporal limitations define. This context is, to be clear, by no means new, much less instigated by my moving-image outputs. The

emergence of a cinematic avant-garde, however problematically its informal membership was policed and its own canons mythologised, is testament to the radical potential not just of photographic and cinematographic imagery but also of the apparatus by which it is produced. Mike Hoolboom, an artist consciously and closely aligned with this avant-garde, has pointed to the "larger liberationist project" that gave birth to a series of political struggles and to the idea that the ways in which images were produced might in themselves be expropriated or reconfigured: "And there was some, perhaps preposterous sense that if one could decode or look closely enough at the materials of cinema, one would find within it encoded the mechanisms of capitalism itself – and that we would be able to undo those mechanisms by asking the audience to engage in different modes of attention, and therefore live in some way outside of that system" (see Pattison 2014a).

While a fuller consideration of the histories of photography and (anti)capitalism is beyond the scope of this text, briefly establishing these key tensions – between what I take to be the composition of a shot on the one hand and its ethical component on the other, and between who gets to produce an image and the socio-ideological weight to which their mode and method of production lends expression – is useful in considering the ambiguities that underline *9 x 45*'s playful engagement with urban space. While the film is structural in the terms that I have outlined, the conceptual decisions I made in making it have also resulted in a significant departure from *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, not just in terms of what I was filming but also how I went about capturing it. If the result of this departure, as I am about to suggest, is to me an interesting failure within the conventions of structural film, it also makes possible a consideration of my practice within a broader documentary tradition.

As discussed, in making *9 x 45*, I had identified three problems. They bear repeating. First, the visual and physical inconsistency of the film's sites of interest – Preis's planets – would present a challenge in a way that the Lea's bridges and Ljubljana's stone monuments did not: while no two bridges or monuments are the same, they could at least be filmed in such a way that compositional variables were minimised, enough for an impression of differences in ambience to be conveyed through repetition. Second, Preis's planets are not encountered along a prescribed route: their scatteredness accommodates choice in a way that a towpath or public park do not, which meant the artistic approximation of the distance between these sites was not as readily translatable, either through cuts to black (between bridges) or long dissolves (between stone monuments). Third was the combination of these two problems: graphical variation plus

geographical choice meant that I could not merely shoot each of Preis's sculptures in the same way. While all three problems took meaning from how I had conceptualised my two previous films, it was their combination, and the solutions that I proposed in working through them, that resulted in a film that simultaneously speaks to the questions of structure and sequence that I had set out to do while also providing a significant departure from the previous two films.

The deviation in question, significant because it makes it possible to position my practice within a broader documentary tradition, is the inclusion of multiple shots within each sequence: nine in Mercury, eight in Venus, seven in Earth, and so on. This sense of multiplicity is no doubt amplified by a shot-length that is appreciably shorter than that of the previous films: its fragmentation, its segmentation, its discontinuities, are more apparent. *9 x 45* is consequently a faster film than *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, in the same way that, say, Benning's *Chicago Loop* (1976) is faster than *Los* (2001). Subsequently, while the previous two films were structured around graphic continuity, *9 x 45* proceeds through a series of sequences containing multiple shots, angles, viewpoints. There are no sustained dissolves, here, nor is there the suture-like, stop-start rhythm of a punctuated river trek; the film instead unfolds by distinctions and contrasts, a disjointed and scattered patchwork whose interrelations are necessarily obscure and resistant to easy comprehension. We might consider this difference by imagining the same strategies inverted, where each bridge or stone monument is captured not from the same angle each time but from multiple and different angles each time. As already mentioned, however, each of the walking routes prescribed in the production of those two earlier films is conceived as a straightforward line; what felt important and unique in the production of *9 x 45* was the fact that, in taking its structure from an installation dotted across the map, the film was less a continuous procession through sites encountered along a single and drawable line than a dispersed drift away from some kind of centre. In coming to terms with my novel decision to shoot multiple takes at each site, I realised that my interest in the installation was how it accommodated an alternative mapping of the city, a network of scattered points that were discrete rather than continuous. Another way of thinking about this is to remark that, while my interest in Preis's planets was not unlike my interest in the Lea's bridges and Vlasto Kopač's stone monuments – less to do with the things themselves, that is, than with the spatial and psychogeographic engagement of city space that their interrelation evokes – the sculptures on this occasion did not accommodate or prompt the same kind of cinematic interest. To begin with, most of them are too small to be visible in a shot as wide as those in *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*. To document their existence *as*

well as giving some impression of their environment was not possible with single takes: we were now in need of close-ups, wide shots, variation.

In making this conceptual decision, then, I found myself in a practical search for material in a more active way than I had when conceiving *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, whose built environments were so readily translatable to a cinematic rendering. Whereas I arrived at each bridge and monument on those walks with few choices to make before filming and moving on, here there were nine sites, eight of which required a range of shots and none of which was predetermined. In this sense, if my practice is one relying to some extent on both structural and sequential preconception, the only shot in *9 x 45* that felt (and feels) like it bears some kind of authorial signature in line with the previous two films is its closing shot – perhaps not surprising, given that it was my initial walk to Pluto in 2013 that gave birth to this project. My conceptual decision to include nine shots in the film's first sequence was dictated by the triplicate fact that there were to be nine sequences, that each sequence would contain one less shot than the previous, and that the film's final sequence would constitute a single, uninterrupted take: in retrospect, then, it seems that the film was in some way structured less around *Nine Views* in its totality than my abiding interest in its most distant satellite. Likewise, the film is sequenced as if to serve and prioritise that final shot and the playful ambiguities, the destabilised relationship between the incidental and the point of focus, that I discussed towards the end of this chapter's previous section. As such, the film's title can be viewed as a wry acknowledgement of the extent to which the challenge I had set myself was possibly no more than a numeric one.

This tension, between the conceptual and the practical, is affirmed anecdotally in production terms and by some of the critical feedback that the film has received by those who have viewed it. In terms of sheer pragmatics, there is something to be said for my familiarity with the Zagreb locales when compared to my familiarity with the River Lea and the Path of Comradeship and Remembrance; where I had walked each of those sites multiple times by the time I came to film them, I arrived in Zagreb having not visited the city in four years. Any lack of familiarity was compounded further when, having arranged to be in the city for four days – long enough, I had thought, to plan and capture the material I wanted – I landed without my hold luggage; the airport's two-day delay in delivering clothes, toiletries and tripod to my hotel reduced my window of productivity by half. Setting myself a target of shooting all material on the penultimate day of my stay, then, so as to avoid the untold pressures of a last-chance scenario, I was consequently prone to errors, oversights, misjudgements. One such error is that shot in the

Earth sequence in which the eponymous sculpture is out of focus; another is the fact that, shooting in such time-sensitive conditions, I came away from Zagreb having not even considered capturing any footage of Ivan Kožarić's *Grounded Sun* – which, in retrospect, might have afforded me options when it came to editing the film and choosing how or whether to explicate its premise. Indeed, we might say that the formal commitments I had made to shooting *Nine Views* clouded my on-the-ground process: the impatient and comparatively cavalier attitude I took to each locale underlines and results from the scattered nature of Preis's work, or at least the extent to which it challenges a one-person documentation shot in a single day.[2]

The point I wish to make here is that this point-and-shoot method, necessitated as it was by both a conceptual commitment to *find material* and the pragmatics of having to *get it done* with little preparation, induced in me an acute awareness of myself as a documentarian. If *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach* had presented themselves as compositionally and editorially preconceived, here I was recording images in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, the tripod being perhaps the only instrument preventing my process from following in the style of *vérité* or street photography. The challenge of finding enough material for each sequence made me conscious of it as filler: I found myself conceiving of such footage as coverage (Brown 2016: 66-71). This challenge was also compounded by the bunched nature of the first four locales: aware that from a purely aesthetic point of view each sequence should boast some variety, I found myself struggling, under such time constraints, to find viewpoints that were both distinct in character and of compositional interest. Restricted to the general vicinity of each locale, and not wanting to veer too far from the corresponding sculpture, I found myself mining the same sites for content. One consequence of this is people's repeated appearances across several shots, as in the Mercury sequence and its recurrent shots of a market whose sellers, workers, managers and customers all intermingled for the half-hour or so I took to shoot the material there. At other times, different compositions were arrived at merely by pivoting the tripod 90 or 180 degrees between takes. Another consequence, stemming from both my need to capture small sculptures within their wider environment as well as my need to find variation within that wider environment, was the addition to my practice of shallow focus. Hitherto absent from my work, due to my tendency to favour landscape shots and to my preference for images in which no one element is asserted as

[2] I had, true to the never-not-on lure of freelance cultural work, arranged to interview the musician William Basinski, in town to perform a closing gig at Zagreb's 25 FPS Experimental Film and Video Festival, on 30 September – my final day in town. For an account of this encounter, which also connects some of Basinksi's formal and thematic priorities to the making of *9 x 45*, see Pattison (2018a).

more important than another, examples of shallow focus can be found in the Mercury sequence as well as in the Saturn and Jupiter sequences. Privileging some parts of the image with a clarity over other parts, shallow focus becomes another articulation of choice, of discrimination, of authorial intervention; the subjective vantage point behind the lens, the manual manipulation of aperture size, reveals an artistic process that is conditional rather than complete, sentient rather than automated, selective rather than all-seeing. Indeed, that aforementioned shot in the Earth sequence, with the model planet out of focus, underlines the human contingencies behind my mechanical gaze – something that is by coincidence thematised by the presence of a CCTV camera in the background of the same shot.

The relative arbitrariness of *9 x 45*'s compositions, as well as the inescapable proximity of its images to a bustling city-centre infrastructure, are unique in the context of this thesis. Constructed on the fly, and often on a whim, they introduce a spontaneity and potentially more imaginative energy to my practice, which otherwise takes much of its meaning from the structurally preconceived. Such arbitrariness is also perhaps why some viewers have remarked that *9 x 45* is in some ways the most conventionally documentary-like film of the three encompassing this thesis. One viewer, for instance, has observed a more obviously ethnographic thrust in the work. Another has guessed at my relative disinterest in the locations I filmed. These remarks are, I think, at least true of the early sequences, in which the comparatively brief shots as well as their relative density in terms of human activity come close to revealing a documentarian perspective that is more searching than considered, more dependent upon said activity for the generation of audiovisual content than detached from it: the mechanical gaze is less indiscriminate here than it has previously been, lured to and dictated by the motions, rhythms and incidentals of the urban milieu. The fact *9 x 45* contains people and faces that linger, lurk and recur, as distinct from those that pass through the frame in both *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*, further highlights my unprecedented proximity when making the film to an urban centre. There are buskers here, newspaper sellers, café patrons, market stalls: crowds. It is on these terms that *9 x 45* is a document of peripherality, of human behaviour and movement – not by remaining within the confines of the periphery regardless of what is or is not unfolding there, as in *Lea River Bridges* (in relation to London) and *Lubiana Laibach* (in relation to Ljubljana's centre), but by proceeding gradually outward towards the edges of the city.

There is another way in which the practical realities of production made me more aware than ever of my position within these spaces. If having to hurriedly set up tripod-fixed shots

makes one conscious of the filming process in real-world terms, it also calls attention to the ethical component of image construction (to reiterate the idea of image-making as a thing of consequence, try erecting a tripod to film from a narrow city-centre sidewalk without causing some inconvenience to a passer-by). This is to some degree always the case. Setting up a tripod in a public location, in a world in which the mechanical gaze has simultaneously become banal and suspicious, commonplace and conspicuous, is never not a daunting and therefore reflexive process; that I can do so largely free of harassment speaks once again to the privilege that my visible presentation and lived experience embody. My dual position, as someone who was both part of and separate from the crowd, is suggested in those shots in the Venus and Mars sequences, in which other people are visible filming the same spaces as me, albeit on pocketable devices, as seen in figure 9. When, whether in the final film or in an outtake, these people become visibly aware of my presence, I am an offscreen, Dziga Vertov-like man with a *tripod-fixed* movie camera, provoking others to look directly into my lens, as if suddenly aware that their own subjective gaze is itself under scrutiny. The duality of my position is also summarised by the feeling that haunted me throughout that day, a feeling resulting no doubt from the practical measures I was having to take to fulfil the conceptual premise I had conjured: as a tourist with artistic pretensions, a filmmaker exercising prejudice in terms of what is filmed and what is not filmed, an operator of a mechanical gaze recording publics not aware of my intentions. This dynamic found its purest form when I came to film the busker who appears in the Venus sequence; as an outtake would reveal, the busker stopped abruptly mid-song as soon as they became aware of my camera, and demanded with hand gestures that I give a monetary donation before resuming their performance. The film was suddenly, in ways I had not anticipated, to be one with subjects, strangers who are looked at and othered by the lens in the documentary's more straightforward observational vein: an extraction, however paid-for, of audiovisual content.

***Figure 9. Cinema of attractions in* 9 x 45**

Considered as such, *9 x 45* connects the formal emphases of the structural mode to an observational practice that is rooted in the early formations of the moving image and in the broader historical development of the documentary form. Prior to the emergence of the narrative system as we now know it, the cinema privileged a mode of spectatorship that was active and aware of itself in ways not unlike the structural films to which I have made reference throughout the present text. As Tom Gunning (2006) stressed when first defining and theorising it, the cinema of attractions – the dominant film form from the medium's invention to around 1907 – took its name from its "ability to *show* something" (382; emphasis in original), from the exhibitionism embodied by performers and subjects returning the camera's gaze (ibid), and from the way it "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity" in unique events, which by virtue of being filmed are presented as being of interest, as attractions in themselves unburdened by the need for a narrative tether, dramatic hook or psychological motivation (384). As Gunning (383) also posits, image consumption during the early days of cinema was as defined as much by a fascination with new technologies as much as by what Schonig calls "the visual reproduction of contingent motion" (32). The spectacle of the machine was equal to that of the images exhibited through it. This kind of attention to the cinema apparatus may have diminished as a result of architectural developments, industry demands, and the onset and dominance of narrative cinema (the construction and standardisation of cinemas, for instance, and the relocation

of the projection equipment to a usually sound-proof booth). As the above quotation from Mike Hoolboom attests, however, such attention has long been the political thrust of the cinematic avant-garde; attending an expanded cinema event at an experimental film festival today will further evidence the fascination that the cinematic apparatus continues to hold for audiences and artists alike.

In line with this attention to the tactile and technical, we may also look to what scholars have, since the end of the 2000s, termed the spatial turn (Warf and Arias 2009; Guldi 2011): the multidisciplinary reassessment of space and its reinsertion into the social sciences and humanities, less as a central condition of everyday life than a means of gauging and steering our negotiation of it. Although it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the relationship between the spatial turn and the post-Fordist shift from the finite workplace to the deterritorialised atemporality of mobile telecommunications (Warf and Arias 2009: 5-6), reemphasising the spatial does nevertheless assume urgency in the context of an increasingly aspatial and asocial world, or rather a world in which the boundaries and lines of space are being radically redrawn in ways unfavourable to those already marginalised and disenfranchised by capital. Given the difficulty of comprehending, quantifying and giving tangible form to the more insidious mechanisms of neoliberal globalisation – much less the mass phenomena of displacement, dispossession and ecological catastrophe ushered in by them – tethering an analysis of the world to its bricks and mortar becomes another way of bearing witness to such mechanisms. In this sense, the spatial turn provides a useful historical context for the re-emergence of Gunning's cinema of attractions within the post-war experimental film as well as an increasing interest, for documentarians, in the ways in which architecture and infrastructure govern perspective as much as movement (Pattison 2018c).

In films such as these, and in the films of artists such as Nikolaus Geyrhalter and Heinz Emigholz, a consideration to framing, to the arrangement of pre-existing features, solicits a mode of spectatorship that is conscious of landscape, architecture and infrastructure as things "to be looked at, investigated, studied" (Pattison 2018c). As I have written elsewhere:

> What's happening here? There are the in-frame dynamics: textures, energies, the contingencies of the actual world experienced in real time. But there's a more reflexive component too: the fixed rigidity of the frame, highlighting the (typically scarce) movements within it, poses fundamental questions about the very mechanisms of spectatorship. Moved to ask why we're being made to watch something – and why we're acceding to such a demand – we're also more likely to question our ongoing relationship

> to the work. Such a process can, if you're so inclined, be enthralling, even empowering. (Pattison 2018c)

That the key tenets of the cinema of attractions are so easily discernible within my own practice is precisely the point. The Warholian long take referred to in previous chapters returned and repromoted the cinema to an investment in looking as an end in itself rather than a process in service of some narrative impulse. Additionally, it was the unerring fixity of Warhol's camera, whose own mechanical gaze was amplified by its tripod-fixed motionlessness, that reified the technical capacities of film. As Schonig (2018) notes, an enduring fascination with these capacities "has served as a useful reminder of an attraction to the moving image that precedes narrative pleasures" (31). Impossibly static, the unmoving camera asserts a mechanical gaze that delimits and affords our perception of contingent motion: as Schonig observes, "we *see the seeing* … and we do so as if through the same set of eyes" (37; emphasis in original). *9 x 45* can be situated within this rich cinematic tradition: its significance lies in its synthesis of the structural with the observational, the preconceived with the ethnographic. Additionally, embodying a looser approach half-driven by circumstance, the film expands upon ideas of fixity and chance, of structure and serendipity, of on- and offscreen space, set out by *Lea River Bridges* and *Lubiana Laibach*. Perhaps most interesting and exciting, to me, is the way in which, as a day-in-the-life-of documentary snapshot, the film grounds and locates Preis's planets, immortalising their set coordinates through film in the same way that they themselves lend permanence to Ivan Kožarić's *Grounded Sun*: a work of video-based critique setting out to find and come to terms with the psychogeographical propositions at play.

Survey/Surveil: Concluding Remarks

> A determining factor in my decision not to provide any kind of voiceover narration, by which I might have explicated the research aims of the film, was due to its specific construct: never mind what I might think, what might *you*?
>
> — Michael Pattison (2018b)

In the final shot of *9 x 45*, filmed in an underpass on a motorway near the western boundary of Zagreb, a white van speeds left-to-right through frame. Watching the footage back, years after I shot it, I catch what might be a glimpse of my own reflection in the vehicle's side window. Pausing the footage, leveraging a privilege not granted to a cinema audience, I single in on what turns out to be the two frames in question. Sure enough, I am standing both behind the filming apparatus and visible in the image it is recording: thick white biker-like jacket, grey shorts, trainers; headphones on, tethered to the tripod-mounted camera, kit bag on back. On 29 September 2018, temperatures reached 19°C in Zagreb and humidity levels were 37%. The combination of my sartorial choices, these meteorological circumstances, and the necessary burden of carrying weighty, technical equipment hardly constitutes optimum conditions for a 19-mile walk. Spotting this image at the tail-end of a project now spanning half a decade, I am taken aback by the Sisyphean perversity, the comical doggedness and borderline vulnerability that it retroactively paints (the exhaustion of that day that I now remember, the technical mistakes I was making due to the specific pressures under which I was shooting the film). While the image is literally too blink-and-miss to provoke meaningful discussion at a public screening, its appearance within the broader context of this specific scene nevertheless underlines and allegorises two tensions central to a consideration and summation of my practice. These two tensions afford an opportunity to consider the characteristics and limitations of my practice, firstly as one defined by a mode of production whose solitude and singular authorship may undermine claims of a potentially radical politics of looking and listening, and secondly as one rooted to questions of the urban. In briefly acknowledging and outlining such limitations, I will then consider some further avenues of research beyond the present scope of this thesis, before concluding with a summary of its contributions and achievements.

First: the extent and ethics of the task's singularity. The task itself here was to investigate opportunities and limitations within the psychogeographic dérive as a cinematographic method

for surveilling urban space. Within the specific context of a 90-second, steady-stare long take, the brevity of the moment in question – me standing, hands in pockets, behind a camera – is key to understanding the ways in which my practice both conceals and reveals the singularity of its image-making methods. On one hand, my reflection in the passing van's window accidentally exposes the set-up to be that of a solo practitioner – one whose lived experiences as a white man condition a privileged gaze that objectifies place, and whose methods must therefore always risk charges at the very least of earnest tedium. Balsom (2021) notes that "there is no denying that this archetype is profoundly gendered, associated with a particular kind of masculinity, with cowboy values of strength, autonomy and an absence of sentiment" (94). In contrast to what Garnet C. Butchart (2013) champions in so-called ethical documentaries as "a decision to unconceal the privileged place of [the camera] hiding between a world that gives itself to be seen, and the world shown by it through images onscreen" (679), my brief appearance in *9 x 45* is inadvertent. Earlier anecdotes about my decision to re-film specific takes on the River Lea, due to accidents drawing in and making visible my otherwise offscreen presence, uphold such notions of mystification and concealment.

On the other hand, however, focusing less on people as consenting or non-consenting subjects than on the patterns, rhythms and trajectories of public space and its infrastructures, my films are not documentaries in the conventional sense. Adopting and combining techniques commonly associated with experimental film and the cinematic avant-garde – the immobile camera, the uninterrupted long take, stillness and repetition, opacity and an emphasis upon the incidental – my films construct a viewing experience around a consideration of looking and listening as partial and subjective processes, as acts of interpretation and engagement. In other words, if such films are made possible not only by a physical ability to walk, say, alongside a motorway in a European capital city armed with a camera and tripod but also by a sociocultural capacity to stay there, in a manner that might be considered in other contexts to be suspicious or to constitute unwelcome loitering, they also leverage this capital and privilege to generate an awareness of tensions between structure, repetition, and rhythm; between stillness, duration and multiplicity; between disruption, perception and play. In my practice, looking and listening internalise and embody these relationships while also perceiving them at work in their totality. It is in this context that my practice is, like James Benning's and Jonathan Perel's, an expansion upon and departure from the strictly formal investigations of the structural film first established by P. Adams Sitney and his contemporaries. As Balsom notes: "If, for structural film, the screen

was primarily a surface, for Benning it is both surface *and* window. His interest in structure is not a matter of making content subsidiary to outline but in exploring the tension that exists between the two" (83; emphasis in original). It is along these lines that the present thesis advances a spatial politics: a means of physical, geographical and figurative orientation, that is, in which looking and listening – paying attention – are actively predicated on the idea that the world's codes and relations can be seen, heard, revealed: that they can be unlocked, understood, known. The radical extent of these films, and of my walking practice, resides in the ways in which they contribute a deeper understanding of how the miraculous, revelatory and/or marvellous may still be found in the urban, and of the armature that a practice that combines film and walking provides for joined-up and dialectical thinking.

Second: the extent to which the task is distinctly urban in character. To walk distances such as those undertaken for this thesis, while wearing the kind of clothes and carrying the kind of filming equipment that I did, says something not just about the walker but the environment in which the walk is undertaken. Conversely, it is worth noting here that mine is a distinctly urban practice in its amateur credentials: as my choice of footwear for these treks attests, this is a terrain of tarmac and blacktop, of pavements and towpaths, rather than bogs and peats or hills and valleys. One will come away from specialist retail outlets unsatisfied if searching for the £75 Reeboks that I wore in Zagreb; ditto the bomber jacket and FK Partizan Belgrade scarf that I am wearing in off-camera selfies during my River Lea shoot. (Looking back at photos from November 2014, when I first completed Ljubljana's Path of Comradeship and Remembrance, I am aghast to discover that I am wearing a pair of skate shoes – a comically impractical choice for a 21-mile trek along asphalt.) Just as Robert Sheppard (2007) attributes the strengths of Iain Sinclair's gigantic, decades-long intratextual project to his instinctive distrust in and tacit disavowal of authorised gatekeeping and the established canons of cultural mapping (17-8), my attire on these walks suggests an attitudinal disregard for the more professional and prohibitively-priced notions of walking that are perpetuated and commodified by brands and retailers specialising in outdoor clothing and equipment. If there are implications around gender here, as acknowledged throughout this text, there are also class dimensions: this is a walking practice that takes meaning from its own marginality rather than any sense of community, from an eschewal of rather than an aspiration to wearing or carrying "the proper gear" (Mason et al 2013: 226). It is a walking and film practice rooted to the street-level vantage point of the urban intersection rather than the godlike views of a mountaintop conquest.

Other questions persist. While my practice deploys and reveals a gaze that is located and partial rather than all-seeing and objective, its dependence upon a cinematic context brings limitations. Though I maintain such a context is essential to the experience of both the film's internal relationships (rhythmic, narrative, audiovisual) in their totality as well as those of the environments captured by the recording apparatus, it does expect of the viewer certain assumptions: less a specialist or historical knowledge of the cinematic avant-garde than an acceptance of the normative conventions of the cinema space itself – conventions magnified and felt to a perhaps even greater and more exclusive degree in the white cube. If this is a practice that claims to train and prime viewers in new methods of looking and listening – if it *is* to lead, in other words, to Benning's wryly articulated scenario of a better government – then what of its limitations as an institutionally marginal one? If such marginalisation is wilful, if it is too precious about viewing conditions, it will forever run the risk of perpetuating the same old cultural hierarchies, the same old snobberies and exclusions, that took the political potency of an avant-garde for granted in the first place. One cannot here rely on the transformative potential of the cinema space alone. The challenge, then, is to expand and transform a cinema of observational insight into one of critical empowerment. That the mode of production here is one of solo working, privileging an image of the lone wanderer, might be one problem: how to integrate the radical contingency of the spectator into the filming process itself; how might the people whose lives are shaped by such infrastructures play a role in how those infrastructures are filmed, engaged with, encountered, contested? How can such a practice develop and strengthen a physical ontology of participation (Schrag 2018)? How, in short, might Benning's practice lend itself to a genuinely more collaborative model, to co-production per se? How might mine? For his part, Benning has famously run classes at the California Institute of the Arts, where he teaches, in looking and listening – thereby situating his own practice within a broader political remit and educational context. One further avenue for research, then, might seek a synthesis between a filmmaking model whose production mode and aesthetic priorities engender avant-garde practices on one hand, and community-oriented programming and collective artmaking on the other. How are the tools for looking and listening, for a critical spectatorship, democratised? To what extent can the ongoing institutionalisation of such tools *be* democratised? Straddling distinctions between artistic intervention and direct political action, these questions return us to the historical problems and existential dilemmas, the age-old distinctions between interpreting

and changing the world briefly outlined in the introduction, that plagued Debord and his fellow Situationists.

If such questions suggest that my practice as a walker-filmmaker is independent to a fault, however, they nevertheless provide an opportunity to take stock of the present research's contributions and achievements. As stated at the outset, this research was less concerned with sociological findings than the communication of certain features within the urban experience and an approximation of a particular method of engagement. Taken together, the three films constituting this thesis solicit and encourage a mode of spectatorship that is aware of itself: through the combined use of the aforementioned aesthetic techniques and formal strategies, my films assert and activate a spatial politics in which looking and listening can be acts of disruption, perception and play. In investigating the ways in which an urban walk can be structural, sequential and durational, the films have themselves adopted such attributes. My contribution here has been an intensified approximation of these properties in moving-image form. Significantly, the film techniques deployed have often work in counterposition: contingent motion emphasised through stillness; the contingency of chance encounters emphasised through the fixity of the visual frame and narrative structure; minimalism as a means of understanding simultaneity. It is worth noting here, as a way of further concretising notions of such counterposition and interrelation, that while the present text has contextualised the films by proceeding through theoretical considerations of structure, repetition and rhythm, of stillness, duration and multiplicity, and of disruption, perception and play, it could have applied any combination of these to each of the films. I could have discussed *Lea River Bridges* with regard to its disruptive, perceptive and playful attributes, for instance, or engaged at length with the structural, repetitive and rhythmic qualities of *Lubiana Laibach*, or indeed spoken of *9 x 45*'s strategic application of stillness, duration and multiplicity. All of these considerations, as has been argued throughout this commentary, take meaning from one another in such a way that the commentary itself could have proceeded down multiple routes. That I opted for the discursive structure that I did is reflective of two things. Firstly, it confirms the chronology of the thesis and its development: the ways in which the formal challenges I set myself were in response to previous findings, and how as the walks developed, they also seemed to lose shape, compelling me away from stylised structures and towards more straightforward documentarian images. Secondly, it reflects in basic terms my intuition regarding which film most suited a discussion of

which set of attributes: which of the three films gave a better insight into considerations of structure, for instance, or of simultaneity, or of play?

It is in this context that the thesis advances an understanding of walking and filming as distinct practices that can nevertheless, under certain conditions, take meaning from one another not only in terms of form but also in the way in which they assert a truly dialectic mode in their perception of both micro-narratives and the totality of urban life. As such, the thesis reactivates the dérive, a tradition that emerged in a particular historical moment as an aimless city meander, and validates it both in terms of a more destination-oriented walk and as a cinematic method. In establishing certain principles, guided by distinct sequential traits within the urban environment in question (bridges along a river, monuments along a footpath, sculptural iterations of a city-spanning installation) the lineal, circular and networked walks undertaken here lend themselves to – and assert – a uniquely cinematic quality that simultaneously emphasises a documentation of city life and an understanding of it that is at once critical and imaginative, scientific and speculative, perceptive and playful. In this sense, my thesis synthesises Iain Sinclair's notion of stalking with the steady-stare technique he himself is so often drawn to as an artist and walker. It is here too that the relationship between fixity and chance prevails: unfolding in a way that is spatiotemporally bound, as a documentary snapshot of a specific urban environment on a given day (London, January 2017; Ljubljana, November 2017; Zagreb, September 2018), my walks and films are also highly formal works constructed and calibrated for maximum stylistic effect. As documents, they capture and communicate on-the-ground energies, intensities, atmospheres and ambience – a polychronic record of the city in terms of its rhythms, cycles, discontinuities and unpredictable incidents – while also functioning as stimulating experiences in their own right. The walks and films in this thesis call attention not only to the ways in which they distil, distort and stylise the urban experience but also to the ways in which they are themselves being perceived, encountered, understood.

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