

# CITIES GROW, HUMANS AGE <sup>1</sup>

PARKER KAY

*Philosophy is not static. It is anything but static.  
Ergo, philosophers should be on the move constantly.  
On the move, on the prowl.*

These are the opening lines from Andrew James Paterson's Super 8 film titled *The Walking Philosopher*. Quoted in italics throughout this essay, *The Walking Philosopher* was shot in May 1999 with the assistance of Jim MacSwain. It was commissioned by Laura Cowell and Kelly O'Brien for the second iteration of the SPLICE THIS! Super 8 film festival and was the first time Andrew (who henceforth I refer to as Andy) created a work on film rather than video.

Responding to the theme of the 1999 SPLICE THIS! festival—Flawed—Andy set out to create a tour of Toronto's landmarks and institutions. "Some of the landmarks are more iconic than others, and some are characterized by activities commercial, transactional, and sexual." <sup>2</sup> Over the course of the 3 minutes and 30 seconds runtime, Andy wields the camera creating a first-person sequence of handheld tracking shots through the University of Toronto's Philosopher's Walk, the boardwalk at Woodbine Beach, the R. C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, the CN Tower, a now-closed Winners at 57 Spadina Avenue, and the men's bathroom and basement corridors of 401 Richmond, among other locations.

The film's visuals are paired with a monologue, narrated by Andy, that deals with knowledge production, political economy, and play, describing the necessity for an engaged thinker to be constantly on the move. Thinking on their feet, if you will. This energy, speed, and dynamism can be observed in much of Andy's writing, video work, performance, and music; however, I am interested in how it might be applied to his social investment in the local ecology of art and artists in Toronto. Indeed, *The Walking Philosopher* articulates a framework to understand Andy's invaluable contributions and unwavering presence to his dreaded "C" word—community.

As Andy would say, his issue is not with "community" but with the notion of "the community." "It is the definite article that I have a problem with," he says to me sitting in my living room with Kate Whiteway, co-curator of *Never Enough Night*. <sup>3 4</sup> Stemming from his time involved in Toronto artist-run centres in the 80s and 90s, Andy's sensitivity to the elitism of selection and the inevitable omissions that follow can be observed in much of his work, especially his writing.

**1**

"Cities grow, humans age" was a line in an email that Andy sent me on January 28, 2023 following a studio visit where we discussed *The Walking Philosopher* at length.

**2**

Andrew James Paterson, *The Walking Philosopher*, Andrew James Paterson Video & Film, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.andrewjamespaterson.com/the-walking-philosopher.php>.

**3**

Kate Whiteway co-curated *Never Enough Night* (April 26 - May 26, 2024) with plumb members Laura Carusi and Anthony Cooper.

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Andrew James Paterson, interview by Parker Kay, March 20, 2024, interview, Pumice Raft Oral History Project 02, recording, <https://soundcloud.com/user-68888435/andy-essay-clips-mixdown>.

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Andrew James Paterson, *Systems and Corridors* (unpublished novel), collection of Andrew James Paterson, Toronto, 27, <https://www.andrewjamespaterson.com/writing/systems-and-corridors.pdf>.

“Community, community. Definitely one of the most over deployed and meaningless words in the entire English language, she cursed to herself. Right up there with that other moralistic adjective ‘accountable.’ As Brenda Carpenter routinely but coldly accepted the microphone from Bruce, Nancy knew the word ‘community’ was about to receive a truly royal undressing.” 5

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Sarah Galea-Davis, “Portrait of Andrew J. Paterson, 2019 #GGARTS Winner,” YouTube, February 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V4wN6EGl-k&t=115s>.

In the video portrait produced on the occasion of his Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2019, Andy says the community “smacks too much of you belong / you don’t belong, and if you exist then you belong.” 6 The economy of this one sentence is telling. In only sixteen words, Andy summates his issue with the singular notion of the community as well as states that the main qualifier for his attention and engagement is presence.

To know Andy is to see him time after time at art events, gallery openings, and screenings around Toronto ready to engage with anyone from a close friend to a total stranger. Even if you have never spoken to Andy, you most likely know his name or recognize his face from here, there, or everywhere. I’ve witnessed him strike up countless conversations, always meeting his interlocutor with a curious wit and questions. Here it is important to clarify that I am not describing a socialite, life of the party, or social butterfly. I am instead describing a set of characteristics and personality traits invested in fostering dialogue and discourse among peers and colleagues.

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*Chroma Lives* was curated by Erin Alexa Freedman and Lili Huston-Heterich. It took place from June 1-30, 2016 at the Camrost Felcorp Yorkville Plaza Sales Centre, Toronto. An accompanying publication was commissioned by If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Amsterdam.

The first time I spoke with Andy was at a public discussion as part of *Chroma Lives* 7—a reimagining of the 1983 group exhibition *Chromaliving: New Designs for Living*. In an exhibition that both referenced a previous happening and created a new one through its referent, notions of past and present communities, scenes, and narratives were the topic of the day. Andy was interested in speaking not only to his memories of the original event but also to how I might interpret them retrospectively. Slipping in and out of different decades, the conversation centred around the value of personal connection in relation to artistic movements and moments. Andy later observed that it felt like “a set for a stage play... a performance has taken place and props are left for the players to possibly return.” 8 Luis Jacob, another artist present at this discussion, would later articulate an appreciation for Andy’s practice of radical presence and “showing up.”

“It’s good to know that one can live one’s life by showing up. I see him have conversations with all sorts of people and those people have conversations with him. He’s such a walking

encyclopedia. He’s amazing. His brain is an archive and he loves flipping the pages with you.” 9

Given the above accounts, one might describe these as elements of a social practice. Within contemporary art discourse, social practice is used to define artistic practices that take community engagement as a medium in itself. Examples of social practice are often community organizing, activism and advocacy work, collaborative production, and relational art (i.e., relational aesthetics). Within this articulation, I’m not sure it fits to categorize Andy’s sociality this way. Plus, ought we call it a social practice if Andy himself has not? Instead, I would describe it as an organizing ethos driven by the curiosity to discover the subtleties of urban praxis. Praxis becomes a stand-in for the process of practicing, moving through, and realizing new ideas through experiential learning. Indeed, the act of daily praxis is an articulation of Andy’s shared interactions with people as he moves around the city.

*Philosophy inevitably must involve banter and exchange.*

*Philosophers should always signify availability and willingness to negotiate.*

I try to convey the significance of this to Andy, but he quickly dismisses it by saying, “Well, I am part of society.” To my surprise, though, he did go on to reflect on these aspects of his work and life in other words.

“I like the idea of the flâneur, though. I think that is a fairly good way to go through life, in some ways, being a flâneur. [...] You interact with people you may not already know, or you may know them slightly, [and] you have a discourse. You have a not particularly fixed conversation [and] you might see where it goes.” 10

The concept of the flâneur as an urban wanderer whose state of being exists somewhere between contemplation and distracted drifting was first introduced by Charles Baudelaire in the essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” published in various issues of *Le Figaro* in 1863. Baudelaire’s flâneur moves through the city on foot, winding up and down streets, boulevards, and alleyways “distill[ing] the eternal from the transitory.” 11 For the nineteenth-century philosopher, this was a framework to reckon with the “indefinable something we may be allowed to call ‘modernity.’” 12 Indeed, the flâneur’s gaze is split. One eye observes the city as it flows by, while the other eye is fixed on a vision of history that animates the present in the delights of

9 Parker Kay, “Luis Jacob Discussion 05-21-2022,” YouTube, August 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmguERLFSSs>.

10

Andrew James Paterson, interview by Parker Kay, March 20, 2024, interview, Pumice Raft Oral History Project 02, recording, <https://soundcloud.com/user-68888435/andy-essay-clips-mixdown>, Pumice Raft.

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Charles Baudelaire and Jonathan Mayne, *The Painter of Modern Life, and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1970).

12

Ibid.

13

Ibid.

the imagination. As if embedded in the stone blocks of Paris, Baudelaire's flâneur reveals "the poetry that resides in its historical envelope." 13

14

Noun. The act, action, or behaviour of the flâneur drifting through the city.

Walter Benjamin picks up on Baudelaire's flâneur in the late 1920s as he begins work on what would eventually become *The Arcades Project*. Here, Benjamin longs for the image of nineteenth-century Paris and the labyrinthian psychogeography enabled by the Baron Haussmann city plan. Instead he claims that the conditions for flânerie 14 had since been marginalized by the "social and technological conditions of modernity: the growth of motorized transport; the monopolizing of urban public space by consumer culture; the ubiquity of red tape and the standardization of the nine-to-five day." 15 Here, the flâneur becomes a dissident figure responding to the effects of modernity's historical materialism. For Benjamin, the flâneur is an expression of an explicitly marxist view of the city and its modern development.

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Bobby Seal, "Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project," *Psychogeographic Review*, May 13, 2014, <https://psychogeographicreview.com/walter-benjamin-and-the-arcades-project-2/>.

It is clear that the image of the flâneur is contingent on a political framework. From another perspective, some might be inclined to think of the flâneur as a loafer who is idle, bored, and loitering; as someone who indulges in distraction, dissociation, and day-dreams. However, the city is not a neutral space. If we consider the growing skyline as an index of how production shapes our spatial and social relations, then the flâneur's characteristics become the embodiment of subversion. This subversion is one of resisting the connection between productivity and production. We drift to resist the logic of the city and its spatial organization around economic activities.

*Marx was at least halfright—all exchange is ultimately materialist and only those privileged enough to deny it will actually make this denial.*

Returning then to Andy as a flâneur: I see Andy's vision of the city not as split, but as doubled. We can define his flânerie both in terms of his prolific presence around the city and his willingness to drift through conversations without premeditation or strategic outcome. As Andy would say, "thinking is a bodily act after all." In fact, throughout *The Walking Philosopher* we glimpse Andy's attitude towards an embodied notion of knowledge that is often expressed through the erotic or the ecstatic. Sex, eroticism, and the body, in all its fleshy precariousness, are important dimensions to Andy's practice that cannot be separated from his flânerie. For the flâneur, the city is the site of the untidy, unpredictable, and utterly

cacophonous evidence of everyday life that swells at the seams of urban standardization and containment.

During a television interview promoting Bennett Miller's *The Cruise* (1998), the main character and former New York City tour guide—Timothy "Speed" Levitch—tells Conan O'Brien that the city is his lover and by moving through it he eroticizes the streets, rendering them into flesh. 16 Throughout the 76-minute black-and-white documentary portrait, we come to understand that Levitch's urban *cruising* (a slang term often used to describe the pursuit of sexual encounters) represents total catharsis. In contrast to this erotic ecstasis, Levitch describes that urban systems like the New York City grid plan (Commissioners' Plan of 1811) are "puritan and homogenizing." 17

*Binarisms such as Teacher/Student, Master/Slave, and Top/Bottom are not fixed—they by definition enter into a play zone in which rigidity makes sense as a negotiated option subject to reconfiguration.*

*The Walking Philosopher* interrogates a similar tension between the erotic city and the will of capital development. Andy deftly moves the viewer from one notable location to the other, all the while subtly suggesting an undercurrent of sexual subversion. Shots of the CN Tower become a stand-in for a civic landmark as well as the epitome of phallic emotion. Contrasted by shots of the public bathrooms at 401 Richmond, Andy reminds us that the erotic influence is all around and that its degree of visibility is often predicated on its saleability. This Marxist understanding of space, the city, and the flâneur helps us frame this dimension of Andy's practice as a daily expression of his ethics of being. A form of resistance against the gridded logic of the city and its political economy.

We might say that Andy *pays* attention to people as if it is a currency. 18 This social orientation amounts to a form of *investment* in those around him that explicitly exists outside of a capitalist paradigm. Perhaps the reason Andy's ability to appear socially omnipresent stands out so remarkably is that it is, in fact, a radical gesture.

"I think for a lot of people, community means the market. Is that person part of the community? Do they shop at my store? Do they drink in my bar? We're all one aren't we? We're all a happy community. Well, ya, they buy my product. You have to love people in order to exploit them." 19

In Andy's biography he describes his own work as engaging "in a playful questioning of language, philosophy, community

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"Timothy 'Speed' Levitch on Late Night November 11, 1998," YouTube, November 12, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMVTHv3E1Y&t=2s>.

17

Bennett Miller, Marty Beller, and Tracy Mcknight. *The Cruise*. USA: Artisan Entertainment, 1998. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9awJCyj550>

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I was introduced to the idea of paying attention as a form of currency that exists outside of an explicitly capitalist system by Lili Huston-Herterich in an email she forwarded to me on July 28, 2023.

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Andrew James Paterson, interview by Parker Kay, March 20, 2024, Pumice Raft Oral History Project 02, recording, <https://soundcloud.com/user-68888435/andy-essay-clips-mixdown>.

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Andrew James Paterson, "Andrew James Paterson - Biography," collection of Andrew James Paterson, accessed April 18, 2024, <https://www.andrewjamespaterson.com/>.

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An Oxford Comma is a comma used after the penultimate item in a list of three or more items, before 'and' or 'or' (e.g., an Italian painter, sculptor, and architect).

and capitalism in a wide range of disciplines, including video, performance, writing, film and music." **20** Before endeavouring to write this essay, I may have glanced at "community and capitalism" and figured Andy was simply not a fan of the Oxford Comma. **21** However, I now understand this to be further evidence that Andy sees these as interconnected systems and that this minor example is illustrative of the larger concerns within his practice.

*This little philosopher is clearly uncomfortable with a dominant philosophy that insists that all play must ultimately involve that frustratingly inflexible material known as money.*

The final shots of *The Walking Philosopher* are handheld views of Richmond Street, just west of Duncan Street. The camera ambulates from window to window, glimpsing signage of businesses that no longer exist in buildings that have likely been razed to the ground and replaced by condos. The last image we see is a sign that reads "money money money money money money" advertising the long-since shuttered Money Nightclub at 199 Richmond Street—a perfect embodiment of the community and capitalism that Andy's flânerie pushes against.



Andrew James Paterson, still from *The Walking Philosopher* (1999). Courtesy of the artist and Vtape.