

How did you get involved in working and researching aspects of walking and the pedestrian environment?

JRN: Probably the first thing that I love trees and that I love being around nature and being with nature and the work I was doing in Toronto was challenging whether or not it was appropriate to plant trees in cities along streets. I was very keen on this I wanted to plant trees everywhere. When I started looking into this there was sort of a residual idea that cars would run off the road, crash into trees, and that people would die, that trees were bad and that they shouldn't be planted. This led me into some very in depth research on the effect of trees on cars and particularly on accidents and particularly on deaths. And my research was showing that every place that I was doing these major plantings and everything, and I was doing it because there were pedestrians around who wanted trees for micro-climate attenuation, or for aesthetics or for a sense of identity and all that... the effect on the cars was quite the opposite, it was saving lives, crashes were reducing and there was less body damage, and less property damage, and so the sort of wife's tale about trees I wound up disproving it, and in the process since I got really involved with the pedestrian realm along transportation corridors, you know because of the trees and what I was trying to do with urban forestry was a system running parallel and in some cases interwoven with the civic space of the pedestrian. That was what got me into pedestrians, it was the trees, you know (laughter) trees and the pedestrians' love that brought me to the pedestrians.

I am intrigued about the trees alongside the highways, that when you started looking at this, that you found that they actually contributed to both the drivers' environment safer, and that of the pedestrians. Do you know, was it certain types of trees, was it distance apart of trees, was the age of the trees or the growth of the trees, what..

JRN: There have been a lot of studies done since that original bit of research, you know, 15 years ago, or almost 20 years ago now, and I think some people are now going with the idea that you know if you can manipulate the space and you give people a different sense of their speed they can think they are going faster than they are in fact going you know. If you can use a diversity of trees, you can get a more complex edge along the vision you know and the more complex the edge the higher the sort of friction effect, and the closer they are to the kerb, interestingly enough, the slower the drivers will go which results in reducing the severity of the crashes. I am making generalities here, and I have to say that the site specifics are important, it is not as though the tree is standing on its own in some kind of an abstract standard. It does matter where the road is, how wide it is and all these kind of things as to what kind of treatment can be put in on the side. And then for the pedestrians it seems that the presence of the trees certainly made a difference in their perception of whether or not the pedestrian realm was meant for them or whether it was OK for them to be there. If the sidewalks were built, we found out that building a sidewalk didn't mean that the pedestrians would want to use it. Parents of young children didn't want their kids to use it, unless it was set back away from the road, and they felt a lot better about it, if it had trees in the lateral separation. So I guess what I am presenting here is get the pedestrians as far away from the pedestrian traffic if you can which sort of dah (laughter). That a buffer of trees is better.

Physical presence of the trees then was felt by pedestrians as being a barrier so if cars came off the roadway, they would collide with the trees and not with the children.

JRN: That was definitely part of it, and and stated a exactly as that, “I feel protected by the trees they are preventing the cars from hitting me when I m walking”, I got that in some of the interviews. But the other thing that seems to be happening, that is interesting in the design for children, is that had to do with the way that the children walked. They don’t go down a straight line. They go all over the place. They are moving forward in a kind of trajectory but there is a lot of lateral distance especially with groups of kids. And all of the mothers and fathers that we interviewed said that when when their child was walking with their friends they wanted at least 2 to 3 metres of lateral separation form the road, and when you would ask them why they think so much and less narrowways, they would say that it is because the children walk three abreast and the one that is on the kerbside, if they start pushing and moving around, that child will wind up stepping in to the kerb lane. So because children walk three abreast, if they’re four they walk two and two, but if there are three, they will walk three abreast. So that to make an environment safe for children it needed to have a substantial and wider separation from the cars, than they would want for themselves, and less than adults would need. That idea of the tree was buffering you from being hit by the car was one thing and the other thing was that it created this environment that was a a little bit of spillover for the pedestrian activities that might spread beyond the width of the sidewalk.

What you said earlier on that I felt was very intriguing was that the pedestrians began to feel that these places on the side of roads that were protected by the trees were places for pedestrians to walk

JRN: That they belong there.

Yes, now the other thing that I am intrigued about is understanding about the width of the actual path not the width of the buffer but the width of the path for the pedestrian. Did you find that people were attracted to wider paths or narrow paths, or did their pace speed up or did children become more excitable in a wider space or a narrow space and was that effected by the distance of the buffer as well? I am trying to find out whether there are connections between what makes an attractive space that we want to dawdle around and play in and combine playing and walking to somewhere we don’t want to be for very long and we speed up to walk out of it.

JRN: Yes, the answer is Yes, there are places that are wonderful to be in and to play, and these are designed to physical in ways different places where you are not to play, or you are not supposed to play, or you don’t feel like playing you know. Here is you imagine the effect of the environment can be one that can either be inhibiting or nurturing. Just imagining yourself, where do you like to play? What kind of features are there? Maybe there is sunlight, or there is a nice tree to climb, or places to hide and seek you know, this kind of thing. A place where you wouldn’t want to play at all would be just would be very stark or very open maybe buffeted by winds or noise, there maybe strangers that you might not feel sure about. But designing a place where you feel like stopping, where you feel like pausing, and sort of

“wow this is fun - its nice to be here”. These places are designed in a holistic kind of way, they are protected, they give you a beautiful view maybe. It depends on a lot of things that come together, to make a real strong sense of place, you know, one where you feel like you belong. We are looking into more and more of how the variables come together that physically contribute to a place that makes you feel happy or makes you feel like playing, or or just feel like being there at all. There are some features, characteristics of these places that keep repeating, for instance people really do like to have a view of infinity - like “Wow look at that”. They like that, they like being in places that give them an opportunity to look up and take a view of something really far away. What would maybe make people want to go and play in space like this, I think maybe that they have to feel like the place is designed with them, with playing in mind. If its a dominant feature in the landscape, a whole bunch of interventions dealing with directing traffic, through a spaces, urr, kerbs, and stop lines, and traffic lights and you know, all kinds of infrastructure that clutters the public space with all kinds of signals for the driver then clearly you are in a space that is meant for drivers. You can try to play in it but it is designed for a driver. Where if you are in a space that doesn't have any of that then, that has a smooth surface from one side to the other maybe, that has shade and benches, and maybe a place to get something refreshing to drink, then you are in a space for people to hang out in or to play in or to sit and watch other people playing. It is just a different kind of setting. So a lot of what we are doing in the research is trying to figure out what it is that people need to understand about the physical environment and we could manipulate it so we can create spaces where people feel welcome and feel joyful and feel like, you know, feel like they belong there, as just a person walking on the earth without a car (laughter).

Today I went on a walkabout in an area of London, which is a pretty grim area in terms of environmental quality and places to walk are very limited, what was intriguing, I thought, there and I had an interesting discussion with people about it, is that there is more and more designing and planning of play spaces, spaces that young people can go to play but there is less and less opportunity for children to play in their local streets. It's as though what we are doing is we are designing for children - we are designing great looking and well designed play spaces for children but they are fenced in over there. And they are not right close to home or right in front of the homes in which people live. You know, we are going to divide up this space, children can go over there, but they can't be running all over the place. Is that something that you have come across?

JRN: Yeah, I think it has to do with the notion of social space, first of all understanding that the street is first and foremost a civic space, a place where community comes together, in many ways, on many levels. You know, if children are part of community, if we have a multi-generational community then the equitable access to the civic space, means that children and elderly as well as the middle adults all have equitable access to this civic space, to this network or system of open space, the primary spine of which is the street. Even if you make a place along the street, along the way, that is specifically set aside for heightened activity by children, elderly or teenagers or whatever, you still have to get there. The path of getting there, between nodes along a civic space structure, you know, along that spine, that path has to be an equitable one, and children, you know, the way they move through space, like elders, is different, they don't walk like an adult. You know, who knows very well, right where they are going, they can get to their car,

they can get in it, they can drive off, and they know precisely how to do that, and they march along at a nice clip, and they get there. Children don't do that, elderly don't do that, people who have movement disorders, or psychological disorders, don't do that. There are all kinds of people who are sharing the civic space. It is like our last, you know, strip of democracy, and you know, if we start channelling it off, and pretending that we have some like have some no man's land that connects these various pods then I think we are really really undermining the sustainable dimension of cities. I mean the street is where the life is, it is the conduit for all of our exchanges, so we have to acknowledge, certainly, that those who cannot drive, must be given, if not equitable then priority pedestrian access to these corridors. This is just a change in prioritising a corridor that already exists, now we already have a democratic network through the city, the corridor is there, how we treat it, how we design it, how we manipulate it, how we plant it these are the choices we have to have. But the spaces are already there, the big blank canvas network is already there. I think the direction right now is to look, look at the street network, kind of like how you would look at your blood, you know, going through the body or the bones going through the body. It is one of those systems that has a flow, has the cycle of life going through it, This system holds within it, the access for the children, the access for everybody, as well as the infrastructure of power, the infrastructure of water, the infrastructure of the urban forest. All these systems are braving together through this conduit, and as we start to develop places, you have to be constantly aware of the interplay between these multiple networks that are flowing through the civic space. And I think if we can respectfully do that then we can start the opportunities to build something in, you know, that is sustainable and viable for a very high quality of life.

Do you think we could measure civilisation or the quality of a place on how the pedestrian is treated, something that we could go round badging more civilised places by saying they re more civilised because they have better facilities or better environments for people to, to walk? And then we can sort of say that this is a 3 walk town or a 2 walk town, or a 1 walk town (laughter)

JRN: Yeah, when you say better facilities for walking purposes, well then you could start rating cities by their virtue of walkability, or the quality of their walk environment, and I think if we did that then one of the measures that we would want to use, would be walking purposes. How many walking purposes are actually being accommodated, like for instance we have the commuter walker, who is the one who wants to go from the door to the door of the car or to the tram to to whatever, and they are just going for it. They don't care much about the environment around them but they do need to be able to pass from the door to wherever they are headed and as long as the way is clear, they are good. Right? So that would get like a one star. They've got actually access OK? And the another purpose for walking might be to walk for health, you want to go out for exercise. You want to be able to walk quickly, you want to be able to you know, do, get your aerobic thing up, so you need space that is relatively comfortable for that, that allows you to move quickly through it and perhaps goes in a loop and comes back to where you began. Then you have the children walk, and that's a very complex purpose, you know, children are trying to go to someone's house, but they don't necessarily want to get there. They want to get to every little spot along the way as well. So the environment we design for them, would be really side, and would be filled with climbing things, tunnelling things, and would be maybe I don't know in

somebody's kitchen window, and out the backyard, and across something else as well, so the children's walking environment, their purpose, their purpose is to explore on the way, and so that has to be accommodated. And then you have people who walk for relief of psychological stress, or they have just had a horrible day and they just need to get out and decompress. Just de-stress themselves, and walk and just let their mind, just let them get totally relaxed. And that takes a while, and does need some beauty, and it does need maybe a chair, and a place to cry, and you know (laughter), some place to yell. So the environment for that, the design of a place for that. A design of a place for someone who wants to go shopping, and maybe meet with a friend, and then have a coffee and then come back, that kind of an environment maybe another rating. So if we took all of these different purposes and I said that cities that can truly provide walking environments for all these purposes that people have behind the reason why they walk, these are really, should be highly rated pinnacle cities, as they are truly giving a diversity of opportunities for access to all the different purposes of walking. You know, the one that I have been playing with recently is the philosopher's walk or people who walk for contemplation. The notion there is that people who walk for deep thinking or trying to connect with nature or deeper joy, these people are the most demanding of the environment, because in our research has shown that they are the most sensitive to the presence of nature. They are the most sensitive to the width and dimension of the paving surface that they are walking on. They will go out of their way, to take a route that has certain aesthetic attributes and things like that, so. Giving people a chance in a city to start a one kilometre contemplative walk without interruption. You know, when they come to a street, the light is already green, the traffic will stop for them, they can carry on with their thinking, or their conversation or their deep thinking. This kind of an opportunity, to be able to step out of your door, to take a one kilometre uninterrupted walk in the city, in my mind is the pinnacle walking experience in that sense, that if you can do that, that you have pretty much a city that can do all the rest of it too. For it is just so hard to find that slowed down deep thought quiet time, and walking will give that to you.

And you have found a city that offers that.

JRN: Yes

Can you tell us a little bit about where you have been, and the philosopher's walk in particular that you have been studying?

JRN: Yeah, well there are a couple of them, the one that is the most famous is probably the philosopher's walk in Kyoto, it was actually a path that Nishida Kitaro, the Japanese philosopher took for his daily walk to think things through. It is a route that follows along a canal and goes to very beautiful places in the city of Kyoto, but also goes through shopping districts and more secular type places and it connects up. And this is a walk that he took everyday. And people got to notice that he would go on this deeply thoughtful walk every day and you know, develop his ideas.

What time in history was this?

JRN: I am trying to remember what the exact year was. He was a contemporary of so it would have put him in the early twentieth century. His philosophy, the ideas that he developed. I am certainly not any kind of official on what Kitaro's ideas were, they were very very sophisticated, but some of the notions of 'being' connected to some deep sense of time and play, were some of the things that he was exploring, in his communications with Heidegger in particular. And then Heidegger and his students developed the phenomenology idea. So I think what these philosophers were doing in their inter-relationships with themselves and the places they were in, and these walks that they took, that they were actually using the walking as a device to help think through ideas and the environments where they did this are particularly interesting for me. For instance, right now I am in Germany and about to go to Freiburg where Heidegger worked and studied to compare the places that he walked with the philosopher's walk in Kyoto to determine whether there were any similarities. I have just got off on a walk on the Pilgrimage trail, the Jacob's trail through southern Germany, the one that goes to Santiago de Compostello in Spain. To look and see whether that trail and the environment around it has any particular attributes that might be similar or different from the environments where other people have walked in deep reflection, is there something in common. The one thing that I am finding that seems to be common in all of them is this idea of constant rhythmic presence of the mentions of water along the edge of the path or that the path itself has a kind of rhythm to it, you know, the pace that you can get into begins to establish its own rhythm; the wall along the side has columns that come at repeated intervals in a very steady kind of way, almost as if you could pace, your body pace and the environment pace that you can come up with some kind of a synergistic harmonic between you and the earth and that that this somehow keeps recurring XXXX 22'45". The next step would have to be looking at the physiology of a contemplative person, you know, when they are walking. I find it fascinating that there are these environments in these cities and countrysides where people will go to think things through. Rousseau did the same thing, Kierkegaard did the same thing. So what is it about walking and thinking something through, and getting in touch with a deeper part of yourself. How important is that to people and cities struggling to survive in this chaotic world we have?

You had Guy de Bord the French *Situationalist*, the idea of the 'drift' or the 'derive', the wander aimless, or apparently aimless through the city. And here you are talking about someone who undertook a repetitive route, followed the same route - did he always

JRN: Yeah, it was a very deliberate route. I want to ask you something about this idea of 'drifting' - here's my thoughts. I thought that maybe the first time that Kitaro did his walk, or Rousseau did his walk, or Kierkegaard did his, or Heidegger did his, that the first time they did it, they just kind of blasted out of the house, or hut, or you know, home or whatever it was, and just went out on a walk to work things out, almost in the way that anybody would. That if you are in the middle of something, you just need a break, you know, you get up you go out and you just walk. And then you start to notice things, you you've come out of yourself a little bit, either way the sun will hit off the dome of a cathedral, or something will happen and it will bring you to attention, it will bring you to a sense of like 'being' and then you go, "oh my God. I'm being, I'm just being" and this clears your head and you can just sort of chomp away at whatever it was you were working through. If that happens to you a couple of times, I think you are going to get very

intrigued by this idea of walking, you know of walking to work it out, walking to think it through, walking to get to that idea that is just eluding you, you know. And soon, the walking path that I think Kitaro starts everyday it becomes actually the way that he studies. It's like some people they get their work, they get their coffee and their computer and their papers and their book, and they set everything up and they start their timesheet and they go to work, right. Well I think this is what Kitaro would do, except he would put his shoes on take his cloak, get his cane, step out the door, and go on his walk. That's when he started working and I think that that this notion that walking is an intellectual device; you know, it is something that is really really missing in contemporary cities. Where do we go out to just walkabout and get back in touch with ourselves and some idea of what we are, and just being, you know. So this is good stuff. If if you wind up finding a path that really works well then keep going there, in a lot of ways that is like the guy who going, you know, he's got his coffee cup, and his computer, and he's just having, he knows the environment which he can work in, so he just recreates that everyday and then works. In a way I think that was what might have been what Kitaro has done.

Other artists I have interviewed about walking and art, quite a few of them talk about value of doing repetitive walking where they follow the same route, maybe everyday, for a period. One artist is particular comes to mind immediately, which is Hamish Fulton, who believes the walk is his art. What he talks about when he gets people together he will take them on a walk everyday, and it will be the same walk, as what he says is that your mind becomes released. He says the first time you make that walk. picking up all sorts of things about it; the second time, you take it, you are then beginning to recognise certain places, the third time, you can switch off about recognising places, and just see the out of the ordinary. It is that sort of progression. And he says you get to a point almost where to walks, as I think you are saying about the philosopher's walk, it almost becomes a process that releases - you let go of things as you go on the walk, and the walk is re-enforcing the process of - call it meditation. Certainly he is not the only artist who has talked about the value of repetitive walking.

JRN: There is this theory about arousal that says that we place our attention on things outside of us that have a certain degree of complexity and interest and things that become less complex after repeated .. you begin to know them more and more so they become more and more familiar and there is less surprise and uncertainty in them I think I quite agree, I think at that point it is not that things become boring, it's just that you don't have to worry about it anymore. And there is a sense of security, and comfort so you feel like you can let things go, because you don't need to be aware and alert to the externalities to assure your survival and all this kind of thing. You're pretty secure in them, so you can let it go. Which would mean that environments that are just simple and repetitive would more conducive the deeper introspective thinking that a philosopher or artist, or someone who is really trying to get to some deep place might go to. And then in the middle of all that security and simplicity of the environment, you do have this expression of nature that happens. I don't know what that is about, you know, when I work with my students on this and I tell them that I want the to relax that someplace is familiar. Every time you get this "oh - aha" moment, you know, where you just go "wow this is" I want you to record what that is, what happened as at that moment, and so many of them will say that this is when they got their "aha" moment when the sun did something, or a little breeze came through, or there was a

shift in the way the roses were arranged in a vase, that they always saw. And so so they actually connect with nature. Simple, simple, setting and then this little zap of nature that has come through - deeply profound connections. So if in a simple design of our environment, in the repetitive really kind of boring nothing that we do, as designers of today we are much more complicated than I am talking about. But if we, you know, we just did a little edge that kept going along the side of a canal, and it just kept going and going and going and going, may be we knew a bit of that in order to get to a deeper more profound, you know, connections with our selves, and who we are and where we are, that kind of thing.

Usually to wrap up the interviews, what I ask people is I ask them to recommend a walk that they enjoyed taking but I am also intrigued too as I would like to ask you: a) do yo walk to clear your mind when you have got a problem that you are thinking on, and b) how far do you need to walk to achieve that for yourself that “aha”moment.

JRN: Yes, yes, yes - I do walk like that. I teach like that. I don't teach in a classroom very much any more all my classes are taught in motion, you know, while walking. But by the 11 minute mark, I think I have gone fairly deep, and I am testing now to see whether that is consistent. After about 11 minutes, by then, I have been able to make connection with nature several times sometimes a long continuous connection of a sort of sub-deep level, sometimes depending on where I am it can also be a series of in and out. Given to about 20 minute, there it seems to be that I get back into the social world again, thinking about this and that, things I am supposed to be doing, what ever. But the other thing when I went on a walk when I did that Jacob's walk, I walked for about 20 kilometres, and then after about the fourth hour of walking in this back beautiful German villages, deep woods, gorgeous countryside, rolling hills...it was just fantastic. With my students, I started to realise that there is something about the really long walk, the Pilgrimage walk, which was the trail I was on of course. It is the long long walk on which you go for hours. You must be like the long distance runner, eventually you hit this kind of point, that once you break through that you are in the one from there on out (laughter). I think it would be nice if everyone could get a chance to transport themselves just a little bit from the pressures of their life and just slow down on a walk, a very long walk. But I was surprised that that very long walk took me in to a totally different place than I was in before.

Can you recommend a walk, apart form the one you have just mentioned, the Jacob's walk, do you have one nearer home?

JRN: A walk through your own neighbourhood tells you a lot, I think, and the trick is, for me is, the walk that I take must be immediately accessible to me. I love going on Jacob's walk, but I can't always get to southern Germany. I need a place that is right near me so that I can start walking and just keep walking, and have it accessible to me everyday so as I do like to do the same pattern for all the purposes we talked about.

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