Walking Cities: London

Reading through the anthology Walking Cities: London, besides being a pleasure in itself, confirms urban walking is now not just the realm of down-at-heel Thames loafers, but since its reinvention by the Situationists (under the influence of Jean-Paul Clébert’s Paris Insolite, 1952), a serious artistic praxis that despite its mainly literary history can function as an interdisciplinary tool, one that Walkative, the Royal College of Art-based group behind WCL, claims ‘informs and triggers new processes of making, thinking, researching and communicating’. Furthermore, that both front and back inside covers carry photographs from Richard Wentworth’s ‘Making Do and Getting By’ series alerts us to the way the contingencies of salvage are bound up with walking.

Firstly, a health warning: WCL is not a user guide for the mainstream tourist keen to ‘do’ London, but 19 intensive reports often from obscure neighbourhoods or familiar yet overlooked streets. Architect Peter St John’s purlieu is Holloway Road, which he reconceives as a university town, though his eye is most taken by a red sequinned high boot displayed in a shop window.

David Dernie’s beat is Tottenham Court Road and he explores it iteratively under three headings – Horizon, Memory and Matter – tracing this boulevard’s spatial poetics until a fractilised model of the area emerges.

London looms as a vast, ever-changing city, one of Britain’s rarest spiders. Sitticus distinguendus, one of Britain’s rarest spiders. Designed by the Camberwell Press, each contribution in WCL is prefaced by a black-and-white antique street plan and a blank page marked by a wobbly arrow delineating the walk, as if a seminar whiteboard upon which this pocket book humorously asserts its pedagogic agenda.
