

## Mapping the City with the LP Walk.

*In the early seventies, the Magic Mushroom Street gang who congregated for music gigs in the city around the Amharclann Na Féile venue on O'Connell Street. Walking the streets one day they were struck by a derelict building close to the venue and decided to refurbish it. They organised and paid for materials to clean and paint the façade themselves, an act which attracted the attention of the Guards who spoke to them on it. After being reprimanded they were told never do anything like that again.<sup>37</sup>*

IN CONVERSATION WITH JOE DEEGAN, LIMERICK 2013.

One unique representation of the existence for the youth of an alternative conduit operating between London and Limerick was the LP walk. Circa 1970, this strolling around town with a record album in a particular fashion was a noted activity that resonated with the groups of young people who congregated in the city centre. The LP walk was a task that had to be physically undertaken on the street. As such, the act references the 'flâneur', one that strolls and celebrates the act of strolling recognising that the environment is temporally changed by this act. Change in this fashion references the situationist act of 'détournement' and a general strategy of play. In the essay, *Methods of Détournement*, Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman describe two types of détournement, where interaction with the spectacle of everyday life involves incongruous interruptions where an object or act is recontextualised or 'reversed.' Objects or convention acts are deliberately given alternate meanings to change their determinant condition. An element of play was always to feature (Vaneigem, year). John Rodgers underlines the intent of such drifting as being revolutionary 'fact-finding missions for the transformation of urban living and society in general, for a revolution that was to come' (Author, date p.). Walks in this fashion challenged the concept of modern urban planning and its consequence (the organisation of universal isolation). The Situationists solution to this was to attack, to walk (Rodgers, year).

Through its association with the situationist movement in particular, this act, as a questioning of urban space, has frequently been regarded as an act of resistance, 'The middle-class flâneur has the potential for cultural "innovation", for example via "radical" art, or at the least the expression of a limited form of social freedom' (Fearnley, year p.).

The incongruous kaftan wearing longhaired youth strolling up O'Connell Street deliberately carrying a Bob Dylan or Mothers of Invention LP was a flâneur, fit for the purpose of mapping alternate routes that may be meta-physical. Circa 1973, one Limerick figurehead practicing this was called 'the long distance record carrier' (Author, year p.). The LP carrier would patrol the city centre before coming to rest in a recognised youth spot called the Continental Café inviting conversation on what he was carrying/ listening to. Night time conversations could take place in city centre bars such as The Bailey, O'Malley's, and The Roundhouse. Those who participated in the LP walk were the equivalent to what were once described by the English mods (in an early sixties urban context) as 'faces,' that is, those who prominently paraded their agenda in an urban environment. Limerick's longhaired faces were distinct figures that held their particular standing amongst their peers as flâneurs, representatives of sales people for alternative routes. As innocuous as it may seem, this aimlessness parading of codes had no precedent, there was no generational equivalent.

The LP walk was enough to remind Limerick teenagers that the alternative generational agendas continued to be embedded in images and the street existed to provide a platform for the politics of representation. Such a visual exposition in its own

[37 The Amharclann became the Belltable Theatre in 1981.](#)

quiet way was guaranteed to provoke an older generation who saw, not a young man not following in his father's footsteps, but a non-conformist strolling for the sake of non-conformity. The LP walk in this contest evoked a performance that was foreign without any other Limerick precedent other than being the act of a wayward youth.<sup>38</sup>

The simplicity of the LP walk signified citizen allegiance with everything from foreign protests to folk rock, that is, everything that was not regulated by the conformity of an ordered trip to the barbers by ones parents. It kept the perception of difference public as strolling middle and working class longhairs represented a new agenda that signified difference that hinted at a danger of sorts. Such a provocation, mainly by young males, remained the most direct act of home grown rebellion available to the Youth, and since urban Ireland did not culturally process youth cults to the levels of London or Paris, the cultural impact of the longhair remained longer for the Irish street. By the early seventies the look became a catch-all uncompromising rebel code and instant signifier for those who just simply wanted to provoke their parents. Joe Boyd, a Notting Hill activist (and manager of the Irish band Dr Strangely Strange) said, 'It was impossible to be alive in the sixties, especially between 66' and 67', and not perceive that society was being affected by drugs, music, and youth style. It wasn't a question of belief; it was a question of observation. Depending on your view, you either viewed this development with horror or with pleasure' (1998 p.125).

The simplicity of the Limerick LP walk was a playful act appropriate to youth who were still processing the unconformity language of a pop culture that was becoming increasingly assimilated into a wider cultural spectacle. By 1967, the record corporations were busy co-opting traits of the counterculture in both mainstream and alternative advertising. In 1967, RCA record releases had the banner cry 'Youth Will Be Heard' printed above images of their product. 'The record companies were among the first to recognise the rebellion that was being articulated primarily through music. For example, CBS printed advertisements stating that they supported the revolution, implying that to buy CBS records would in some way help financially' (Author, year p.).

The act of the LP walk also shared street co-ordinates with political youth who would reference socialist, republican, and even a mix of both agendas on street corners. A *Limerick Leader* end of year photo supplement in 2011 mentioned a 'Speakers Corner' operating at the corner of Thomas Street and O'Connell Street circa 1971, the place for 'anyone with anything to shout about could do so' (Author, year p.). The supplement mentions that Saturday afternoons were 'very popular with young lefties' (Author, year p.). In *Resistance through Rituals*, Stuart Hall writes;

'A culture includes the "maps of meaning", which make things intelligible to its members. These "maps of meaning" are not simply carried around in the head: they are objectivated in the patterns of social organisation and relationship through which the individual becomes a "social individual." Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted' (Hall, year p.).

**38** In the early 20th century, popular culture had associated the longhaired persona as one befitting an intellectual character or a middle class individual practicing at the top end of the cultural spectrum. In these depictions, Hollywood portrayed the likes of classical orchestra conductors appropriately coiffed quickly creating the establishment cliché of the brilliant, but

unorthodox, composer or painter. A stereotype of European artists and bohemians would also have featured 'challenging' hair length as an identifier. Of course, these 'mad' geniuses had permission in that their practice was validated by the space of the Opera House or the National Gallery; the street validated only the rebel or the outsider.

The LP walk often surfaces as a vernacular marker in many Limerick period histories. It remains tied into an agenda where space was investigated and musical mentoring took place in a desire to develop places that mirrored the English experience.

'Saturday was a good day. Hung around the Wimpey bar with all the others teenage hippies. Spotting the young hippy chicks. We wouldn't be seen dead with a straight chick... The Hippy Triangle, bars where we all hung out as kids, Joe Malone's, O'Malley's Bar, and The Bailey' (Costelloe, 2014 Facebook).

The return from London of Limerick's premier psychedelic band, Granny's Intentions, played a major part in making real the possibilities of unconformity within an urbanity that was still under development. James Haran, of The Intentions, a leading Limerick Mod, remembers a version of the walk as drifting in style and how one looked contributed to an uncompromised urban identity owned by the youth, 'If I walked out ten miles from Limerick wearing what I used to wear and met a fella my own age on the road, he'd think I was an alien. There was that much difference between what went on in Limerick in 1966 and what was on offer in spaces outside the city' (Haran, 2013).

As provocation, the LP walk – with its ad hoc cultural boundary making – referenced an international definition of urbanity that channelled the situationist mapping of Notting Hill by John Hopkins for a local environment. From the perspective of social geography, Doreen Massey states that, 'if time is the dimension in which things happen one after the other, it's the dimension of succession, then space is the dimension of things being, existing at the same time: of simultaneity. It's the dimension of multiplicity. Space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other; space is the dimension of multiplicity. It means it is space that presents us with the question of the social' (Massey, year podcast).

In a sense, the city of London was channelled in the drift of the LP walk in Limerick as some actors began wearing versions of the afghan coat originally introduced on the cover of the Beatles 1966 LP 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'.<sup>39</sup> Circa 1969–1973 these images merged with those of the long-haired youth protesting in the streets of Derry being then broadcast on TV. To an older generation, this appearance of aimlessness hinted at those who had returned 'changed' and bringing foreign agendas as they set out routes that possibly could be seen to address the history of the city centre streets themselves. Originally laid out from 18th century Georgian plans, the city grid was intended to map Establishment progress whereby the wide streets set the wealthy apart from the narrow streets (and poor) of the Medieval quarters. There could be provocation in the often flamboyant style of these walkers if they paraded this route in what were regarded as elaborate uniforms of dissent. This act echoed the original English act of rebellion where detoured versions of the style of the English officer gentlemen were paraded in both London City centre and working areas by working class youths who registered the antagonistic Teddy (Edwardian) Boy style.

The LP walk remains an understated intervention in Limerick's social history which channelled an alternative agenda as it mapped the city streets. In regards to cultural production, it reflected on imaginary social spaces and it introduced a local practice based on drifting which confirmed the classic situationist definition.

[39 The coat was a recognised alternative uniform, and often a visual short hand for 'hippie protest' in TV drama.](#)