

RESEARCH ESSAY

Paths Made Visible: Choreography as Urban Wayfinding

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A city route can be choreographed before it is mapped. Repeated turns, pauses at thresholds, avoidance of exposed corners, and the pace of crossing traffic give urban movement a learned form. What becomes legible when choreography is used to study wayfinding rather than confined to staged dance? Choreographic account reveals wayfinding as embodied negotiation with design, memory, surveillance, and the movement of others. Rather than asking whether the object is inherently progressive, authentic, communal, or memorable, the inquiry asks how movement traces, pauses, rerouting, pace, bodily orientation, lighting, obstacles, and respondents' explanations of choice organize the association between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement in practice.

A workable inquiry combines stakeholder walking scores compared across time, mobility, familiarity, and perceived safety with a ledger of movement traces, pauses, rerouting, pace, bodily orientation, lighting, obstacles, and people involved' explanations of choice. The ledger separates direct observation, stakeholder explanation, technical condition, and later interpretation. Side-by-side inquiry then turns on whether a route account identifies both the enabling cue and the bodies for whom it works. This procedure leaves room for ambiguity while preventing ambiguity from becoming an excuse for claims that no possible finding could weaken.

Choreographic language can aestheticize forced detours, policing, inaccessibility, and the fatigue of navigating hostile design. The challenge matters because the language of innovation can conceal older inequalities. A responsible answer begins by asking who carries the cost when the preferred explanation succeeds. It then returns to whether a route assessment identifies both the enabling cue and the bodies for whom it works, treating

that criterion as a limit on praise rather than as an item in a procedural checklist.

Commuters crossing a plaza carve a diagonal that official paving refuses to recognize. The path shortens distance, but its width and speed also reflect who can step off the curb and who needs a level route. The scene is useful precisely because it resists a simple moral. It contains both enabling and limiting effects, each traceable to a particular intervention. Through those effects, the link between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement can be analyzed without assuming that every instance bearing the same label operates in the same way.

Scale is part of the explanation. At the level of a single encounter, movement traces, pauses, rerouting, pace, bodily orientation, lighting, obstacles, and contributors' explanations of choice may support the tie between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement; across an institution or repeated work, the same arrangement can distribute different burdens. The assessment therefore tests whether a route assessment identifies both the enabling cue and the bodies for whom it works in both immediate and extended settings and treats any divergence as a reason to narrow the argument.

A night walk by women working late follows lit storefronts rather than the shortest line. Collective pacing and phone check-ins create an improvised score shaped by anticipated risk. The contrast prevents the first scene from becoming a template. Here, authority, timing, and exposure are rearranged, so the same vocabulary carries a contrasting practical meaning. Comparison clarifies the link between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement by showing what changes when responsibility moves among actors and institutions.

Case alignment introduces necessary friction into the interpretation. The dy-

namic between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement names a pattern only after differences in position, timing, and capacity have been retained. Using member walking scores compared across time, mobility, familiarity, and perceived safety, the inquiry separates constitutive conditions from features that are merely frequent. That distinction provides a basis for transfer while protecting local meanings from being flattened.

Urban planners should document desire paths, co-walk with diverse residents, test routes after dark, and treat pauses and reversals as design evidence. The proposal also redistributes expertise. Technical staff, respondents, caretakers, performers, users, and local knowledge holders may see divergent failures. A process that allows those observations to redirect the work is more informative than consultation whose only product is institutional reassurance.

Scale introduces another evidentiary demand. A intervention that supports the dynamic between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement in one encounter may change after repetition, touring, digitization, or administrative standardization. Study should follow selected cases beyond their exemplary moment and ask whether a route reading identifies both the enabling cue and the bodies for whom it works continues to hold when new actors inherit the form without the relationships that first sustained it.

A valuable extension would compare expert and nonexpert descriptions over time. Rather than asking which group hears or sees correctly, the study could trace what each notices through movement traces, pauses, rerouting, pace, bodily orientation, lighting, obstacles, and respondents' explanations of choice and when their vocabularies begin to influence one another. Such work would clarify whether the tie between spatial legi-

bility and unequal freedom of movement expands participation or merely teaches newcomers to reproduce established judgments.

Transferability should be handled cautiously. A procedure developed around one technology, genre, institution, or cultural protocol may fail elsewhere even when the surface activity looks similar. The portable element is the question of the association between spatial legibility and unequal freedom of movement;

the form of evidence and the meaning of whether a route reading identifies both the enabling cue and the bodies for whom it works must be negotiated in each setting.

The larger implication concerns how evidence enters public judgment. When pathways from observation to determination remain perceptible, audiences can disagree with a conclusion without having to reject the entire project. That possibility strengthens rather than weakens

construction because it gives correction a place to begin.

What appears to be a problem of representation is also a problem of procedure, access, and effect. Wayfinding is not merely cognitive problem solving; it is a public negotiation over whose movement the city anticipates. Paths become apparent when the city is read not as a diagram of destinations but as a score continually revised by moving bodies.