

Waking protocols

The act of walking as [in] art

--- curatorial text by Tina Mariane Krogh Madsen*

A walking protocol is a performance instruction that facilitates the act of walking. It can dictate, invite, instruct, point towards or narrate how walking is used, here in an artistic practice. Some walking works are created for and in nature, while others use cityscapes as the backdrop for creating artistic walks. For some this is an individual practices in solitude, and for individual performance, for others it is a collective action. In philosophy walking has been used manifold to gain strength, inspiration and well-being.

The use of manuals and protocols to create action is not a new thing. This has been used in art since approximately the 50s and continued with the Fluxus movement and conceptual art in the 60s and 70s, which has been further revised in contemporary art practices. The conceptual artist Richard Long was probably one of the first artist to see walking as a structured art form and others followed him in this quest.

Walking isn't just walking... it connects the body to place

A walking protocol is an instruction that specifies how an activity should be performed. To create the walks, reflections and choices are to be made. These can be in the movements and relations, pace, patterns, tensions and power structures of the walk, where specific characteristics and minor wordings can be of crucial importance for the final score. The artists sometimes studies the terrain beforehand, in other cases they are drifting towards new routes and paths in an undefined direction. The shared goal is to set a frame, a concept, for a walk to be performed.

“through walking we acquire a sense of physical space and we learn how to measure distances, how to distinguish that which is far off from what is immediate and close by. Put another way, walking defines our experience of self and of the world” (Benesch & Speq, 2016).

Many things are experienced first-hand during a walk, concepts are developed and explored as you move along the path-ways. Walks can become strategies, and the elements in your environment is your co-walker and participator (voluntary or not). The writer Virginia Woolf amongst others used her own walking experiences in her literary work; walking became inspiration, experimentation and practice:

“The walk as act, as politics, as experimentation, as life:”I spread myself out like fog BETWEEN the people that I know the best” says Virginia Woolf in her walk among the taxis.” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/87).

Walking is an embodied practice and experience as well as it is an important part of the creation of space (Low 2017; O'Rourke 2013). This spatial creation is including the reclamation of it, as undertaken by Woolf in her walks. Walking is also an interdisciplinary act. It combines many different fields of expression, practice, and research. Walking is in this way about drawing lines and making new connections to places and to other factors that crosses paths. Writer Rebecca Solnit regards here walking as something that connects and aligns us with the world that we live in (Solnit 2001/2014).

Nature – being in the world

If we look at the history of walking in art, the interest in using nature is not equal to a renewed interest in the landscape as an artistic genre. The walking artists wanted to discover a more authentic relationship with nature and focus on the experience instead of representation - “Being *in* the world rather than before it” (Mæglin-Delcrois, 2015). David Henry Thoreau is an important figure behind this way of thinking and his reflections on and being in the wilderness has inspired many. Walking becoming a life practice. Thoreau was a critic and a nature poet, he wanted to be in solitude:

”I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements” (Thoreau, 1862/2018).

Philosophical thought and that of art is in a sphere of relation. Walking and reflecting is unconditionally connected and many philosophers have engaged in thinking and walking, where some could only think while walking. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and other known philosophers used walking as a life practice of thinking, relating and healing (Gros, 2011).

”Walking is connected to breathing; to the intake of oxygen for the brain; to the lubrication of joints; to the flow of our metabolism and digestion; and to the burning of calories (...) It is a medical fact that the minute we stop moving, the body starts breaking down” (Ernesto Pujol, 2018).

To walk and talk and think philosophy. The performance writer and curator Adrian Heathfield (2013) have taken this challenge up as the final part of his research project performance matters, one of them is a “conversation in motion” with contemporary critical thinker Brian Massumi that exercises the potentiality of movement. A way of thinking philosophy that Massumi himself are prescribing in his theoretical reflections, here embodied an put into motion. Walking and reflecting, a thinking as practice.

The cityscape

Besides nature, the city is also a well-engaged place for walking. Especially the Parisian cityscape has been a topic for walking practices that connects to and reflects on a specific place and urban environment. Both philosophical and artistic.

In the modernist writing of Charles Baudelaire and specifically in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) the (male) flâneur was depicted as a stroller, an eye and witness of the city. He was the modernist eye. The counterpart, the (female) flâneuse went unexpected ways, not as free from prejudice as her male counterpart and was for most part overlooked as even existing. The writer Lauren Elkin have written a book about this character, the structures and paths that she threads. Elkin is herself a walker and a watcher of walkers, which has given an insight into the field – and material for writing. How walking tells you about peoples health, the time of day, their mood. How you choose how to walk, with your legs as an instrument of communication (2016, 2019):

“If we could disassociate our understanding of power from the way people walk” (Elkin, 2019).

A more radical approach to the use of the city and to walking came from the Situationist International, formed in 1957. It consisted of a group of artists and thinkers that amongst other

things used chance as a crucial concept in a critical urban practice lead by the theorist Guy Debord. The Situationist International criticized capitalism through a mix of Marxism, Surrealism and Dadaism. Debord identified the consumer society as the society of the spectacle, which became the title of his seminal book published in 1967.

“Walking was experienced for the entire first part of the 20th century as a form of anti-art.” (Carieri, 2002/2017).

The Situationist International's use of the city and its playfulness was inspired by Dadaist methods with reference to André Breton's "Dada excursions" (1921-24). The Situationists had a focus on the experience of walking through a method they named 'psycho-geography.' This radical mapping practice included the creation of collages of cities, used for the creation of situations. Psycho-geography as a term was first used by the pre-Situationist group the Letterist International. Play was here used as a radical tool to experiment on how to use and move around the city. Debord proposed the "dérive" [to stroll] for this purpose, which should be regarded as a transformative practice (O'Rourke 2013). Here you follow the path that you instinctively are attracted to, creating an organic and unique experience of the city. Getting lost is a part of this practice, where new situations appear. The Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre mentions in his book *The Production of Space* (1974) that the practice of drifting "revealed the growing fragmentation of the city." A statement that underscores the critical potentials of this method.

The Situationist International thus exercised a criticism of capitalism, urbanism and everyday consumer life. They regarded city planning as an instrument of control. Their method therefore focused on the individual situation with a wish to remove the distinction between artist and audience, everyday life and art, as "micro-political happenings". This can be compared to what theorist Michel de Certeau calls "tactics" (1980). After 1960, the Situationist International stopped creating strolls because the Parisian city planning was so extensive that this practice was not possible anymore. It could only be properly accomplished in historical cities that needed transformation and not in already reconstructed capitalist cities (O'Rourke, 2013). The Fluxus artists wrote similar instructions (to follow), as well as artist-driven tours were organized in the years following the Situationist International, e. g. the "Free Flux Tours" in 1976 (Careri, 2017).

Collective walking, sound walks, and listening to the environment

When you walk you also pay attention and use your senses!

A soundwalk is a walk with a focus on listening to the environment. This term was first used by the members of the World Soundscape Project and the composer R. Murray Schafer in the 1970s. Their focus was listening to the environment as it is and to (re)connect to the environment (Schafer, 1977). Walking and listening has also been extensively explored by the composer Pauline Oliveros who through her intense practice of deep listening implemented walking as a strategy of awareness, to yourself and the environment. Here listening is thought of in an expanded field to a broader spectra of sensuous experiences. One of her instructions "The Extreme Slow Walk" (Oliveros, 2005), explores how, through walking, the body resets the conventional mode of fast walking and sensing with a renewed focus on micro-movements and listening. To give yourself the time to engage with the environment.

Janet Cardiff is a contemporary pioneering artist in the field of creating narrated walks for specific locations through the use of her voice and binaural technology. To capture a specific mapping of the places that she creates her walks for (Cardiff, 2005).

Many artists and thinkers have taken their walks alone, preferring the solitude to clear their mind, or the company of nature instead. The collective walking is another branch of walking, where the collective decision to walk is in focus. The Situationists were walking together, a experience that can be traced back to ancient philosophy, Aristotle and Socrates walking and talking to their students, with movement and thinking already an entity. In a collective walk there is a consideration of dynamics within the group.

Contemporary walking protocols

In contemporary art, walking and mapping has entered a revival. Also the use of electronic media has entered the walking field through the use of devices that measures, collects and stores data, like GPS-mapping, as well as art projects use online mapping to store and visualize walks. In this first edition of performance protocols and its exhibition as well as in the following one, new contemporary takes on the walking protocol is unfolded. From the sole, the critical and collective, to the experimental and relational.

The first performance protocols online exhibition, **Walking Protocols I**, features two types of works, 1) some protocols created especially for the user or viewer to engage with and perform. 2) some instructions created by a performer to be performed by themselves with an invitation for the audience to join in aspects of it. The first type of works additionally distinguishes between acts that are to be created in solitude and in a group dynamic, as social practice.

The playful, dadaist approach to the protocol can be seen in **claus ejner's Performance about evolution**, which is created specifically for the first performance protocols exhibition Walking Protocols I. This protocol, as with other of ejner's works, has a critical glimpse in the eye, with repetition as a central element. Repetition is also a crucial element in **Ilya Noé's Deascent**. This protocol is based on her durational performance for the the 12th Biennale of Shanghai in 2018 that invites others to "surrogate" - re-perform and adapt that performance to their own place, time, and situation. The piece is additionally created for escalators, and in this way dependent on a specific infrastructure that is often found in bigger towns and cities.

Non-verbal, group dynamics and power play will be exposed in **Aleks Slota's Destinations Unknown**, an instruction created specifically for this exhibition. The collective action is additionally key in **Anette Friedrich Johannessen's Active Body-Lazy Mind**, but with a looser structure in relation to the performers relations to each other. Here place and sensation are in focus with a collective frame for performing.

The topic of mourning and butoh walking as the performer's own practice is seen in **Sall Lam Toro's Lutos de Amor (Grievances of love)**, which ritualistic form has been adapted to a performance protocol. Also this instruction has a durational approach, which invites to engagement.

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<http://tmkm.dk>

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