

No-Thought Walking

I am not interested in creating rigid rules for walking practice. My field experiences have generated some written reflections, hoping to inform young artist walkers, to help the contemporary, interdisciplinary art medium of walking acquire one or more recognizable, performative, formal elements, if not full form. I am interested in exploring all that walking activity can generate as a practice, regardless of field, even as I emphasize cultural production. I believe that walking can be a transformative experiential component to creating ephemeral public art.

There are many kinds of walks and goals to walking. A conscious walk starts with clarity of intent, even if the intent is to get lost, so as to give up control. More and more individuals need to give up control in order to reclaim their balance.

There is a difference between the educated surrender to an unknown but nurturing path, and being self-destructive. Contemporary life can be a tightly controlled and surveilled, ambitiously fast, overwhelmingly multisensory, chaotic experience. For some, just walking down an unfamiliar but safe path without a professional goal may be the beginning of reclaiming balance.

No matter how carefully planned, a walk ultimately curates itself, which is to say that a walk always surprises us with unintended results and no results; or with nothing new, the latter being just as important as newness because the maturity of a practice is based on repetition.

Disciplined repetition can consist of the same exact gesture reperformed during a lifetime. Moreover, while there are variations, because of resources or lack of resources, the seasons, age, sickness and health, solitude or company, sometimes the best of them are the subtlest.

A conscious walker may understandably seek to have no-thought while walking. If that is the intent, the walker must be clear that to withhold thought while walking can later be betrayed

Walking School

Teaching is like walking because it is based on repetition. Teaching is based on the repetition of information and knowledge, until learned—until lived. Lessons, tested and enriched by experience, can generate insight and, over time, wisdom.

The act of repetition is not only for the benefit of the student, but also for the benefit of the teacher. Most things are not taught well the first time we teach them. Most things are not learned the first time we hear them.

Teaching takes patient, repeated articulation, in various ways. The teacher learns that the same material must be presented in different ways over time, until the listener's curiosity is engaged by one of the modes of presentation. One mode of presentation alone seldom achieves success with a diverse audience.

The strategy of repeating variations of some material over time creates a union between the teacher and the material, not so much through memorizing but through identification. The teacher and the material become one; the material becomes the teacher's identity.

In this increasing state of oneness with the material, sometimes all walls disappear. Suddenly, teaching has transcended all classes and classrooms, and the teacher is always teaching, not in a pedantic way, but as the living presence of that material in the world. The material has become a way of seeing and being.

Walking teaches us how to walk. The act teaches itself if we are mindful, if we study our steps and learn from them. We also learn how to walk by teaching others how to walk, by studying and learning from their steps. In this process, a walker becomes the walk. In the process, a mindful group of walkers is formed. As a result, a walk becomes a school for walking for all.

Detaching from Art

I believe that we need to detach from art, yet hold on to what art was about throughout most of the history of humanity: the desire to reach a state of existence that is more than mere survival, surpassing material survival by providing insight into the possibilities of the human condition, connecting us with each other and with the planet. In that sense, what we used to call art allowed for the creative expression of the mystery of the self-awareness of matter, which sought to transcend the gathering of food and water, the making of clothing and shelter, our reproduction, and our submission to religious and secular powers.

The artist walker has to become an unapologetic body. Rather than arguing on and on that walking can be art, defending walking as art, I prefer to free myself from the shackles of that tired old dynamic, of having to argue whether something is art or not. I simply state that the question, too, is dated; indeed, it is as dated as the term.

Most of the time, unwillingness or inability to consider walking as art are the result of a conservative notion of art held by outdated critics, or by a mainstream public that was lost by the art world when abstraction arrived. This is a public that holds on to a notion of art as figurative painting or sculpture; it must be educated. Walking as art also requires this same public to stop passively consuming art and start actively experiencing art (participation). But we can only participate in what we have been educated to understand as potentially valuable experience.

Walking as art requires the public to let art into their bodies because of the proximity of walking as a common experience. So, there is a loss of distance from art that is at first disconcerting, but that eventually generates an immersion in the art, because the body and life of the public is the art, transforming art into culture, or recognizing pedestrian culture (common life) as art, as John Dewey once did.

We must detach from art, because art was only meant to be a cultural bridge, it was never the destination. The goal of art was to

Liberating Artists

I believe that walking as art practice, in terms of socially engaged art, radically changes the nature of art-making, not so much vanishing the author as liberating authors by relocating them in three important ways.

First, there is the question of inside versus outside, of moving from making art inside a studio, to making it outside: a transplant that can potentially transform art into culture by engaging audiences.

Artists make art but people make culture when they publicly claim artworks as their own.

Second, it signals the increasing freedom of artists that began with conceptual art. Socially engaged art is a peak in the history of conceptualism, so to speak, by freeing artists from the anxiety of having to materially make art in all places at all times. Artists become the moving containers of art-making knowledge, to be activated or not, if and when art can contribute to issues affecting society.

The liberation and relocation of artists is democratizing, because it places artists back into the commons through their common and uncommon skills. Much like a village apothecary, baker, blacksmith, butcher, cobbler, or midwife, the visiting or resident artist is in possession of a certain set of life-enhancing skills. If art-making were re-understood as labor, as a trade rather than a career, it would democratize the practice.

Artists have valuable, creative skills to offer in the form of aesthetic, meaningful experiences. Artists are no longer mythically conceived as dramatic entities driven to make secretly, but as accessible, creative tradesmen. Artists can be called in, like carpenters, to repair the old or build the new, in front of everyone: a public process that generates accountability from demythologized artists as accessible makers.

Third, as the acquaintance between artists and audiences deepens through available, everyday, participatory, aesthetic,