

'Walking is not a medium, it's an attitude. To walk is a very immediate and handy way of interacting and eventually interfering within a given context.' – Francis Alys

The practice of walking is one that many of us take up from time to time. It can relax that mind and unravel the senses, the rhythm and speed of placing one foot in front of the other involves a simplicity that is easily romanticized. Accepting this optimism, walking also holds a history of agency and change; there is strength to the action, relying as it does only on the human form.

Walking has a long artistic tradition that stretches back to Baudelaire's *flaneur*, a problematic male bourgeois figure whose idle wanderings afforded him a view of the rise of the modern metropolisⁱ. This teleology stretches to the treks of Hamish Fulton, the land art of Richard Long and the Situationists' *derive*, an activity of disorientation in which participants would walk, losing themselves in the city. Casting an eye more locally, the practices of Garry Trinh, Charlie Sofo and Sarah Rodigari are among a number of artists taking up walking as part of their practice. What do these artists find in the perambulatory act? In a culture that equates prestige with velocity, walking becomes an eloquent voice of dissent, connecting with the 'ethics of slowness'ⁱⁱ. If momentum is the primary measure of human advancement in an advanced capitalist society, then walking's stalling of pace perhaps has the ability for us to readdress the values embedded in capitalism's call to efficiencyⁱⁱⁱ.

The photographic practice of Gary Trinh is built upon his daily routine of walking local streets. Tracing the lines of the city with only his camera, Trinh looks for surprises along the way. Trinh's practice is one of sustained and patient walking, along with his keen set of eyes, this combination grants him the opportunity to uncover these moments. Trinh's photography captures things often unnoticed by those in a car passenger seat; a van filled with balloons bursting to escape, a tree that is completely covered in chewed gum, a jumping castle absurdly perched on the roof of a store. A strange and humorous visual language emerges from Trinh's observations.

Yet a nuanced form of local mapping also surfaces from these photographs; as Trinh walks his local suburbs, he tracks the shifts within the neighborhood. For example, in the series *Welcome Home* (2007), Trinh recorded the fortification of homes in the Western suburbs of Sydney as a result of persistent racist attacks made by the media toward the local immigrant population, and the mood set by the Australian government's 'War on Terror'. The addition of rollers over windows of homes and the installment of residential alarms depict a suburb edging towards mistrust of one another. As Trinh describes, 'the walks are like watching the daily news. I get to find out what's happening on the streets and what's going on in my local community.' Trinh builds a collection of innumerable singularities – signs of activity and negotiation within our urban environment. I would also argue that the kind of survey undertaken by Trinh implies participation; his observations are not made with the detachment of the flaneur, observing from a distance. Instead

walking becomes a mode of local thinking and engagement with the dynamics of public space.

A similar mapping takes place in the walks and works of Charlie Sofo. Obsessively collecting and recording objects found during his walks, Sofo draws on the poetics of the low-key and the incidental. Through myriad forms – the recording of the smells that emanate from houses during dinner time, noting the places in which he has found condoms or condom wrappers on his walks, collecting pieces of concrete junk, or the documenting the ‘desire lines’ or tracks worn by human and animal passage, fellow walkers – Sofo’s walks grant him a view of the marks left by the actions of himself and of those around him. Walking becomes a means of finding intersections between these isolated actions and creating a point of contact. Unlike Trinh’s photography, Sofo’s practice is underpinned by a yearning to search and make sense of his relationship to the place around him, yet this occurs only little by little. Walking literally becomes the method for this searching to take place.

As Michel Certeau describes, ‘[Walkers’] intertwined paths give shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these “real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.” They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize.’ A similar kind of spatialization is played out in Sofo’s 2010 attempt to walk the shape of a circle in his neighborhood of Northcote. One can imagine the fences, and houses that would have blocked his path in his attempt to navigate this curved shape – concessions would have been made, and yet in this we can also imagine the form of the jagged path written by Sofo, representing a map that responds to the walker as he tests these trajectories^{iv}.

Sarah Rodigari’s project *Strategies for Leaving and Arriving Home* (2011), in which she spent two months walking from Melbourne to Sydney, is a departure from the relatively amiable walking practices of both Trinh and Sofo. Inviting others to walk with her, Rodigari set off with a strict agenda and destination each day. In light of Rodigari’s participatory arts practice, her project created a suitable framework with which to involve others. She engaged not only with those that walked with her but with the people that she met in towns along the way, often providing her with food and shelter. Throughout the journey Rodigari described how the rhythm of walking was changed by the people that walked at her side. In this way, walking becomes a malleable activity, sensitive to external participation^v.

The simple rules that dictated Rodigari’s walk allowed her only to accept lifts to the next town (it must be noted that a fifteen minute drive was roughly equivalent to one day of walking). Battling the elements, Rodigari’s major challenge was often finding a place to spend the night. In this regard her project of self-imposed endurance connects with the New York based artist Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performance 1981-1982 (Outdoor Piece)* in which Hsieh spent an entire year outside, without entering a building – essentially walking the streets. And while Rodigari’s walk was delineated by the mere fact of a destination, both Tehching and Rodigari’s rules turn walking into a means of survival, so that performance and life becomes indistinguishable. Unlike Sofo and Trinh, who often exhibit the outcomes of their walks in a gallery context, Rodigari’s project was only recorded through a blog

and the walk itself. Walking in *Strategies for Leaving and Arriving Home* played with the romantic notion of the lone wanderer on a pilgrimage; it was also a strategy that allowed Rodigari to work against her own physical and personal limits.

It is evident that a simple romanticism is embedded in the walks of these three artists' practices. Although we can see that their walking has been informed by a previous history of artists, this is not their primary reason for setting out on foot. As Sofo suggests, 'walking didn't come out of an art historical point of view, it came out of a simple idealism.'^{vi} For Sofo, walking is a simple proposition of agency that connects with his own environmental concerns.

This political proposition is also present in the Belgium artist, Francis Alys' work and his project *The Green Line (Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic)* (2004). This saw him over two days walk through Jerusalem, dripping a line of green paint from a can while following the 'green line', the armistice border that Moshe Dayan determined by drawing with a green marker on the map at the end of the 1948 War of Independence^{vii}. In this piece Alys literally creates the line that still affects the Palestine and Israeli people today (this most evident as he casually strolls past checkpoints). However, Alys' line is liquid and imperious, dictated by his own steps^{viii}. His walk also documents residents going about their everyday lives and in doing so highlights the absurdity of this boundary. Fusing both the romantic and the political walking for Alys becomes a way to reconsider our situations.

As Francis Alys' remarks, 'walking is an attitude,' and through the walking practices of Garry Trinh, Charlie Sofo and Sarah Rodigari one can find a kind of resistance within the steps they take ...

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iv Certau

v June 15 post

vi walk with charlie

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