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Walking with Artists

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Walking with



Carmen Papalia, *Blind Field Shuttle*, 2013, walking tour.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Artists

edited by Eugenia Kisin
and Amish Morrell

Introduction: Movement Memory by Eugenia Kisin

Walking with Artists is a partial sampling of contemporary walking practices in Canadian art. Walking involves bearing witness—to space, to other participants, to the embodied imprint of motion—and the very notion of *which* bodies act as conduits for meaning is indelibly marked by structure and subjectivity. Ideals of walking may privilege, for example, the movement of an able body with the cultural and political freedom to travel across borders, or the capacity to access and navigate remote and difficult terrain. To capture these embodied qualities, and their disruptions, we commissioned 13 writers—each one on the recommendation of the artist in question—to write about their experience of one of these walking practices. Their documentation is thus an aesthetic act itself that makes visible the connections that even the most ephemeral walk can enable.

These acts of witnessing also reveal the power of peripatetic practice to make us account for things—for our occupation of land, for the uncanny presence of past lives in the contemporary moment. Walking, in this way, is an exercise of ritual and memory, evoking pilgrimage as a mode of reckoning with the sacred. Secular vigils also conjure these connections as a sense of shared obligation and reciprocity emerges from marches—there is a reason, after all, that so many walking practices draw attention to exchange and the accumulation of sustenance. Notably, this kind of participation is different from the trope of the alienated flâneur: acknowledged complicity allows us to walk together in these projects.

Yet, in spite of the shared nature of the described experiences, these writers grapple with the problem of representation. They are cautious about imposing meaning onto an embodied act, and their documentation often takes the form of a list-like account or a diary, a reckoning of presence tinged with intimacy. Close description takes the place of dialectical criticism, as the question of *how* one knows—through the senses, through movement or through acts of inscription—is called forth by these acts. For the land, too, writes itself onto our bodies and memories.

We invite you to share these walks.

Carmen Papalia: *Blind Field Shuttle*

New Brighton Park, Vancouver
August 2013

by Zach Bergman

Blind Field Shuttle, a non-visual walking tour led by Vancouver-based artist Carmen Papalia, who is visually impaired, is an experience where up to 50 people walk together with their eyes closed. An exercise in trust and perceptual mobility, the experience involves participants lining up behind Papalia, linking arms and shutting their eyes for the duration of the tour. *Blind Field Shuttle* has been performed at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in L.A., CUE Art Foundation in New York, Gallery Gachet in Vancouver, Mildred's Lane Residency and at the Open Engagement art and social practice conference, among other venues. I participated in *Blind Field Shuttle* at New Brighton Park in Vancouver.

To kick off the session, we walked to the south side of the tunnel that entered the pool parking lot. I closed my eyes and held on to Carmen's arm. We waited for around 10 seconds, as I acclimatized to the loss of vision, and then started to walk. The first thing I noticed was the way spaces seemed to grow and shrink as the intensity of the light through my eyelids varied. And things that were distant felt much closer than they were in reality and vice versa. The most impressive thing, however, was the ground: it felt as if it was undulating and transforming beneath my feet. It was like walking on a waterbed with rock hard lining. Something that surprised me was that I didn't rely much on sound as a guide during the walk, but appreciated it as a meditative soundtrack to my journey: the children screaming, the water in the pool, the wind blowing around us, the constant sounds of industry to the east. Another sensation was that I wasn't actually moving and that everything was moving around me. I was pleasantly shocked by the location that I ended up in.

Eryn Foster: *Walking and Talking and Not Saying Anything*

Halifax, October 2013

by D'Arcy Wilson

It was 8:30 p.m. on a mild October evening in 2013 when Halifax-based artist Eryn Foster distributed her phone number to more than 30 people at the Khyber Centre for the Arts, encouraging the rest of the group to exchange their own contact information. Our instructions were simple: to join Foster on a walking tour of Halifax's downtown landmarks without saying anything. Instead, we would relay instructions to one another via text message.

Our initial manouvering of Barrington Street's Friday-night sidewalk traffic was awkward as we typed, adding new mobile contacts while trying not to bump into anyone. It was a sight for passers-by — a large group of adults seemingly disenchanted with each other's company, immersed in their phones, disconnected from reality. If only they knew we were making new acquaintances unburdened by the pressures of face-to-face conversation, that we were putting trust in total strangers by exchanging our personal phone numbers, that we were aware of our collective movement as we clumsily made our way to the first landmark.

Foster guided us to the city's oldest graveyard where we stumbled into a ghost walk, and to the park outside the Public Library where a group of young men arrived to sing hymns and preach to us about sin. We lingered by the Public Gardens just texting, and I was surprised at how conscious I was of my surroundings amidst my technology trance; although I rarely stopped typing, sounds were more vivid and I could sense the commotion of Spring Garden Road around me.

Climbing up Citadel Hill, I observed the beauty of our slow uphill trek — our phone screens casting a cool glow over the green grass, lighting our way to the top of the city. The bell in the town clock chimed 10:30 p.m., and for me, this was the finale. I departed the group, abandoning the safety of my invisible conversations.



Hamish Fulton: *A Walk Around the Block in the Rocky Mountains*

Banff, Alberta, November 2007

by Ernie Kroeger

Hamish Fulton, though known primarily for his solitary long-distance walks, began experimenting with group walks as an art student in the late 1960s in London. In November 2007, he participated in the Walking and Art Residency at The Banff Centre and led four group walks. For the first one, 11 participants met at the corner of Banff Avenue and Elk Street. At precisely 5:00 p.m. Hamish gave the signal and we started out, at a turtle's pace, toward the next corner. We were to circumnavigate one city block, clockwise, over a period of one hour, in silence. Each side would take 15 minutes. The total distance was about 700 metres. It was a surprisingly complex calculation, gauging distance and time together with pace and group dynamics. Across the street, cars entered and exited a supermarket parking lot. I felt self-conscious. Someone yelled out: "Nice pace!" Rounding the first corner onto Marten Street, we had established a good rhythm. Communication lay in the subtle interaction of our bodies and measured steps. This block was longer so we picked up the pace. A few pedestrians wove themselves in and out of our group. Around the next corner onto Moose Street, we slowed down and then, turning the final corner onto Banff Avenue, we sped up again, reaching the corner where we had started at exactly 6:00 p.m. From above we would have looked like a strange walking timepiece, the wobbly end of an invisible minute hand moving slowly around an oblong clock face. I was chilled and therefore happy to finish but also a bit disappointed. I had been lulled into a meditative state and it felt as if time had been stretched and slowed down. Now the circuit was complete and, stepping back into the everyday world, the spell was broken.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *nikamon ohci askiy*
(songs because of the land), Vancouver, 2013



Cheryl L'Hirondelle: *nikamon ohci askiy* (songs because of the land)

Vancouver, 2013

by Ayumi Goto

On February 15, 2013, one day after the March for Missing and Murdered Women, which takes place annually in Vancouver, I performed *Commemoration* in the character of Gei Shagyr. For my performance, red balloons were placed around the perimeter of Oppenheimer Park. Carrying a speaker that played the song "Kikinaw" from Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *Vancouver Songlines* LP alongside the Yoshida Brothers' shamisen piece *Sprouting*, I ran around the park, cutting the balloons' strings with scissors and releasing them into the sky. The purpose of this performance was to commemorate the lives of the women who had disappeared and to honour their families, friends and those who would always remember them. The performance was also a creative show of support for the Idle No More movement: attached to every red balloon was a small Chinese New Year envelope that contained a symbolic piece of copper, and a piece of paper, on one side of which was inscribed the Japanese phrase 自立する and on the other, its translation, "Idle No More."

Inspired by Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *Vancouver Songlines* project, I felt compelled to familiarize myself with the land beneath, around and within me. I strapped three speakers around my waist and each day I ran as much as I could to the music of Cheryl's *Songlines* for 105 days between Canada Day and Thanksgiving weekend. I ran in Vancouver (unceded Coast Salish territories), Saskatoon and rural areas in Saskatchewan (Treaty 6 territory), Cold Lake Alberta (Dene territory), as well as Toronto (Mississaugas of the New Credit), Kamloops (Secwepemc) and Kelowna (Okanagan). After completing each day's run, I painted a picture to convey my experience, wrote notes in Japanese to my mother describing my journey and wrote diary entries reflecting upon my growing relationship to the land. In total, I ran 1568.5 km, the exact distance of the Journey of Nishiyuu, six Cree youth and one guide who

travelled from Whapmagoostui, Quebec to Ottawa to request an audience with the Prime Minister and show their support for the Idle No More movement. Covering the same distance as the Nishiyuu, and sonorously shadowing Cheryl's *Songlines*, I attempted to develop a more intimate and respectful relationship with the land.

www.vancouversonglines.ca

Lisa Myers: *Blueprints For a Long Walk* Lake Huron, Ontario, 2009

Day seven: August 20, 2009

by Lisa Myers

Excited about getting to the railway bridge that crosses the Mississagi River, we left around 10:30 a.m., and walked along quiet, dusty roads and crossed breezy fields, keeping close to the train tracks that marked the way. Around noon, we found a nice, moss-covered rock to sit on and eat lunch. Perched up from the road and settling into our meal, we saw a municipal works truck roll along the road. As the pick-up truck slowly passed by, the driver leaned out of the truck window and glanced at us. We all returned the look silently until my cousin Shelley suddenly yelled, "hey, hey, that's Tom Dumont!" We all jumped up and ran after the truck. Tom Dumont is Great Uncle Tom and Aunt Gladys' son and he lives close by in Thessalon, Ontario. Tom stopped the truck, which interrupted his tour of the county for two summer students sitting witness inside the vehicle. They just happened to be driving along this back road. Learning we had lost our maps the day before, Tom gave us a map of the area so we could find our way to the bridge with ease. He warned us of the 5–6 p.m. train schedule and suggested we aim to get across the bridge earlier.

In 2009, my cousin Shelley, her son Gabe and I decided to follow the same route our grandfather had walked from residential school in Sault Ste Marie towards home

along the north shore of Lake Huron. In doing so, we traversed a distance that existed not just in space, but also in the layered geography of place. We walked during the same season our grandfather recalled surviving on blueberries. We visited the shore of the Mississagi River where he was offered food and conversation in his language, Anishinaabemowin. Walking for 11 days, and covering 250 kilometres, we created new family stories and blueprints for more long walks.

Three years after our long walk I created *Blueprints and Train Tracks* (2012), a series of maps and train track prints, made with blueberry pigment.

Elinor Whidden: *Mountain Man*

Kamloops, British Columbia, 2012

by Bruce Baugh

Elinor Whidden's *Mountain Man* is a modern voyageur, retracing the waterways and trade routes followed by First Nations people and fur traders in the past. As these routes became the basis of today's highway system, and cars have replaced canoes as the main means of navigating them, the Mountain Man uses equipment scavenged from cars, such as tire treads and rear-view mirrors.

In Kamloops, BC, Whidden led a group of walkers to the confluence of the North and South Thompson rivers, long a site of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) people and once a Hudson's Bay Company trading post. About 20 of us, kitted out with walking sticks attached to car rear-view mirrors, walked through downtown Kamloops, across the railroad tracks and down to the river, moving from the present into the past. Mountain Man was more fully equipped: voyageur cap, gaiters, powder horn, water canteen and a fragment of tire tread.

The walking sticks were key: we were reenacting the walks of the voyageurs with rear-view mirrors, which were quite useless since it was far easier to simply turn around to see what was behind than to look in the mirror. We

felt a bit ridiculous. Passers-by would stop and stare at the strange procession we made.

Yet, there was a curious sense of adventure. Using this synthesis of the old (walking sticks) and the new (rear-view mirrors) produced something entirely new, surprisingly discordant and unsettling in the tension between past and present. For me, there was an acute sense of loss regarding the past, of life being invaded by car culture. The tire-track across the Mountain Man's back signified the sacrifice of walking to driving.

And yet it was fun: although Whidden's satire has a serious point, her *Mountain Man* performance is full of humour. We were all in high spirits.



Elinor Whidden, *The Adventures of Mountain Man* — Fort Kamloops, March 20th, 2012, performance. PHOTO: MARGARET WHIDDEN; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Vanessa Dion Fletcher: *Writing Landscape*

Lake Ontario, Toronto, Spring 2011

by Angela Salamanca

Vanessa Dion Fletcher's *Writing Landscape* offers a rich sensory experience that reawakened in me bodily sensations and memories of walking along a shore. As a Lenape/Potawatomi woman, the artist explores the embodiment of her connection to the land by creating a space and time for her reflections through the meditative practice of walking. In her broader practice, Dion Fletcher explores the process of the formation of her identity as an Indigenous woman who grew up without access to her cultural practices and language. In *Writing Landscape*, she documents a process of making and gathering markers by using walking as a language to explore her connection to the land. In this piece, there is no written or spoken language, yet there is a clear communication between Dion Fletcher's body and the earth she carefully—and at times precariously and playfully—treads on, and the viewer. Through the images in the video, I am invited to participate in the artist's process of marking her journey on the land. I notice her walking away from the focus of the frame and back again, and in this ebb and flow of motion, I wonder about the imprints I make upon my surrounding environment and what or how it imprints upon me in return. In viewing the video, the sensations the artwork inspires give way to single words: *imprint, connection, fragility, precarious, foothold, sootbing, playful*.

Dion Fletcher embodies walking as a meditative practice and an unconscious communication between the land and our bodies. The prints created by the etchings on the copper plates are evidence of the artist's presence on the land, of her markings as she travels on it.



Zoë Kreye and Catherine Grau: *Unlearning Weekenders Procession*

Vancouver, June 2013

by Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte

On June 15, 2013, an eclectic group of a dozen novice *unlearners* came together to take part in a 12-hour procession through the city of Vancouver. This collective walk was organized by Zoë Kreye and Catherine Grau as the culminating event of a year-long artistic project researching modes of understanding and being in the world fostered through experiments in embodied experience, intuition, collaboration and the deconstruction of dominant experiential paradigms. To realize the *Unlearning Weekenders' Procession*, the collective put out an open call for the public to participate in the event's workshoping process and/or join in along the way. De-ambulating through the city's different neighbourhoods—starting from residential and industrial areas in East Vancouver, mixing with the crowd in the glossy downtown core, taking in the view across the city bridges and coming to a halt at one of Stanley Park's picturesque beaches—the procession came to be punctuated by participant interventions that, following Kreye and Grau's irreverence for prescribed behaviour, aimed to further the group's venture into the uncharted territory of *unlearning*.

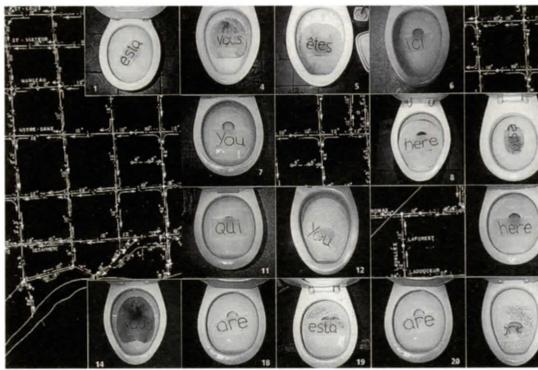
At the core of the project was a desire to reclaim public space, and to momentarily inflect it through a chanting, touching, dancing, backwards-walking, stumbling, laughing, costumed, prosthesis-adorned collective body. Passers-by greeted our colourful procession with bemusement or cheer. And for the participants, the procession became a celebration of the simple pleasures of *being*: being in the moment, being part of the environment and being aware of one's own and others' bodies. After 12 hours of letting go of self-monitoring habits and social inhibitions, we realized that, if anything, we should beware of the comfort of habitual actions and repeated thought patterns and of anything that impedes new possibilities for experience. Indeed there is more to life than we know.

François Morelli: *Histoires des eaux usées*

Joliette, Quebec, 1999

by Didier Morelli

In *Histoires des eaux usées* (1999), artist François Morelli maps out the city of Joliette (Québec) following a meandering trajectory of 61 public and private restrooms to develop a summertime tourist guide. Once located, the washrooms become makeshift studios. In each lavatory, the artist performs a series of repetitive actions that begin by painting a small watercolour on toilet paper. The image consists of one single word from the cartographic sentence: *you are here*, *esta aquí*, or *vous êtes ici*. The sheet is left floating in the bowl to be photographed, showing the watercolour bleeding into the water against the white porcelain. Subsequently, the artist unceremoniously flushes the floating paper down the toilet, an evacuating action that highlights a hidden rhizomatic infrastructure that supports the daily activities of *Joliettains*. Morelli compiles the addresses of each location with an accompanying image and assigns them a number (1–61). The images are used as a lavatory index for a board game where the roll of a dice determines to which toilet the visitor needs to travel. As participants are invited to take part in the work, a new series of chance walks emerge. In his repetitive and task-oriented gesture, the artist transforms the unplanned *dérive* into an action that follows a regulated above-ground network of sidewalks, streets and buildings. While public service spaces disappear in urban areas, Morelli challenges locals and tourists alike to engage with the discharge of their refuse. Cycling through processes of consuming matter, producing energy and discarding waste, *Histoires des eaux usées* underlines the everyday biological necessities of the social body in motion.



Gwen MacGregor: *Seamus and Me*

Fernie, British Columbia, 2008

by Lewis Nicholson

Gwen and I spend a couple of weeks most summers at her family's cottage in the interior of BC. For years we hiked around the area, becoming ever more ambitious in our outings, often heading to the highest points of elevation. On the last of our independent excursions, we found ourselves on a peak after a five-hour hike on a blisteringly hot day, our water supplies completely depleted and unable to locate the anticipated quick and easy route down indicated on the map we'd picked up from the local tourist office. After several fraught hours of bushwhacking along a dry, rocky and log-strewn river bed, wading through waist-high stinging nettles, completely exhausted by the uncertain nature of every footfall, fatigued and disoriented due to our state of dehydration, we found a spring and revived sufficient faculties to return, hours later than anticipated, to an anxious MacGregor clan.

Thereafter, for our more challenging excursions, we employed the services of local professional guides, which is how we met Seamus, a spectacularly intelligent and energetic border collie trained from an early age for mountain rescue work. The hike recorded was a modest half-day jaunt at the height of the summer to a magnificent outlook over the Lizard Range, where we spent an hour or so lounging on the peak, eating our lunch and drinking in the scenery. While we rested, Seamus was off the hook and energetically rummaging around the slopes, perhaps foraging for a little lunch himself, a dog just being a dog, wild in nature, but with a GPS device attached. His movements and whereabouts were only fully revealed when the data was later transcribed and animated. Combined and contrasted with the information from a separate GPS Gwen had been carrying, an engaging portrait emerges of two distinct but interdependent species exploring the same terrain in a manner appropriate to their nature.

Alvis Parsley, *Love Behind the Bargain*, 2013, performance.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Alvis Parsley: *Love Behind the Bargain*

Toronto, 2013

by Camille Turner

Alvis Parsley's performative walking tour *Love Behind the Bargain* is a journey that remaps and transforms Toronto's central Chinatown to reveal an intimate world of love, loss and migration. I was initially drawn to Alvis' work because my own artistic practice has turned towards using walking and sound to tell stories. I took Alvis' walk three times and each time, I entered a headspace that was not my own and experienced the familiar turned inside out. Alvis has a knack for astutely pulling back the veil so the audience can see the world and experience ourselves from a particular, personal, unfamiliar perspective.

The 60-minute walk, which stops at 15 sites, begins at Alexander Park, a social housing complex. The audience follows Alvis through the rear entrance of Chinatown Centre. The young trans artist's small size and soft voice belies the power of their brave vulnerability. Proclaiming their gender queerness and fear of homophobia in Chinatown, Alvis speaks in English and Cantonese in the midst of crowded Dragon City Mall. Heads turn suddenly in surprise.

Through a poetic text performed at each stop, Alvis captures the awkward confusion of a newcomer trying to mimic local cultural practices and explores issues such as the ethical dilemma of exploitative labour practices that enable workers in Chinatown to survive. Alvis' keen sense of observation and critical eye nimbly unmasks white supremacy to reveal how power invisibly structures desire. Statements like "Chinatown—where you feel close to me," explore the polite Canadian fascination with exoticizing the other.

Playing with "double consciousness,"¹ a term coined by W.E.B. DuBois to describe seeing oneself through the dominant lens, Alvis sweetly states, "We admire you, you have such a pretty face," powerfully shifting the uncomfortable gaze to bear on the looker. I recognize myself in Alvis' words and I've returned to this artwork again and again because it brings me face to face with myself.

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994, orig. 1903).

Germaine Koh: *League* — *The Arbutus Corridor*

Vancouver, July 2013

by Jay White

League is a monthly event hosted by Vancouver-based artist Germaine Koh where volunteers convene at a park in south-west Vancouver to invent, improvise and play games. The July 2013 version of *League* was different in that the event occurred while walking the Arbutus Corridor, an 11-kilometre section of abandoned railway line that traverses southern Vancouver's residential neighbourhoods.

Whereas *League* usually involves group participation and teamwork, this time we were encouraged to individually devise parameters to alter the ways in which we

might relate to the landscape along the route. Koh took a glass of seawater from False Creek at the start of the route, and carried it, without setting it down, to deposit the water at the abandoned railway's southern terminus along the Fraser River. Along the walk I transcribed sounds of the environment onto the old metal rails with a stick of chalk. Another participant found a section of an old book and resolved to finish reading it by the end of the walk.

As we meandered along the abandoned rail line, our individual projects became secondary to our collective fascination with the route as an expanse of untamed landscape that has managed to survive the aggressive development of the city. We stopped to eat blackberries, rest in the shade of large trees, and investigate community gardens and discarded objects that have found their way into this interstitial space.

On the surface these activities might seem inconsequential, but they reveal the significance of Koh's project. Participating in a *League* day means consciously committing time and attention to the dying art of informal play, and reclaiming the joy of doing nothing in particular. Participants make rules and games not only as a way to compete and win but also to participate in a mutually negotiated and dynamic social space wherein perfect strangers can enjoy spending time together.

Barbara Louder: *Writing/Walking Sticks*

Halifax and Vancouver, 2011

by Amish Morrell

At the Cultura 21 International Summer School in Bulgaria in 2010, Barbara Louder led 30 cultural workers and activists from 22 different countries on a collective walking exercise exploring communication and relationality. Taking turns being blindfolded, with the help of a partner they used homemade walking sticks to feel their way across a meadow and along the edge of a forest. The walking sticks become an extension of their consciousness and corporeality, enabling them to sense and touch their surroundings, test surfaces and make sounds on objects. As they negotiated the space around them, their sighted partner (with whom they didn't always have a shared language) used voice, intonation and touch to guide them. As the day progressed, they began to use the walking sticks to form a chain and then a net. Like the men in Bruegel's 1568 painting *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, the group ventured across the meadow and wooded area, becoming its own topographic form that slowly changed shape and direction as participants responded to one another's movements, collectively negotiating the landscape around them.

Louder's more recent project, *Writing/Walking Sticks* (2011), brings together walking and writing, where participants collectively explore and inscribe the landscape with the traces of their movement. Each of her 26 yellow aluminum walking sticks have a different letter of the alphabet and a self-inking stamp pad on the tip, so they leave a mark each time they strike the ground. In 2011, as part of "The Walkable City" design charrette in Halifax, participants met with health professionals to discuss the role of walking in addressing public health concerns, spelling WALK in the pavement as they moved through the city. And at Walk21, a conference held in Vancouver in 2011, participants stamped messages on long scrolls

of paper and on the pavement as they walked through spaces and institutions within the city. The group also marks movement itself, the shape and pace of the group immediately identifiable from the bright powder-coated yellow paint of the *Writing/Walking Sticks*. Foregrounding walking as a communicative and relational process, the sticks also enable us to consider how the act of walking also is a way of intervening within, and inscribing, the spaces we share. *



Barbara Louder, *Writing/Walking Sticks*, 2011, performance.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST