

**THIRTY-ONE THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN**

**Give or Take**

By

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## **Abstract**

Creating a zone. Fencing off.

Taking a stand. Still not knowing where I am.

Describing two years in 8000 words.

Using text. Writing.

Over a period of time.

Reflexivity

Attempting. Trying. Situating.

Pick and choose.

Edit and cut out.

No single point to be made.

Methods of auto-ethnography.

Resistance

Research topic: me.

Breaking down walls.

Jumping one edge after another.

It contorts your soul.

A self inflicted battle.

I don't know how to do this.

Making it up as I go along.

Altering sense of identity.

Outsider's perspective.

Sharing preconceptions.

Taking all these photographs. Only not to show them.

Demanding answers.

Understanding through thought, experience.

Showing not telling.

Messy

Uncomfortable reality.

An instance. A narrative.

Self and reality construction in a particular time and place.

Walking

Open to changes, manipulations.

Pacing

Where you do not know where where is.

Map

Walkers

Alone

It's about me.

This space of people.

Being myself all the time.

Writing this is an important part of figuring it out.

Written or otherwise realized.

Some of it is in words.

Signposts

Choosing

What you see is what you get.

Out of reach.

Unknown

Connected moments.

In between yourself and yourself.

So you go with it.

Edges on either side of a the same place.

Impression of a place.

It's not about place.

Where this will have been worth it.

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## Overview

This essay explores the changes that I experienced as an artist over a period of time – the time when I moved from Iceland to Vancouver to join a Master of Applied Arts program at Emily Carr Institute to the middle of my last semester at the school. I use reflexive writing, specifically autoethnography, to ask the following questions: who am I as a photographer? And what does it mean to be an artist? It is through the process of writing that I experienced a significant shift in my practice. This paper is organized into seven sections, each a representation of those shifts as they relate to insights into myself and my research.

Using autoethnography helped immensely in coming to terms with and understanding what I was experiencing. The actual writing of the paper itself was an important part of this process. Autoethnography is a relatively recent method of qualitative research where the writer becomes the subject of investigation. Sometimes perceived as self-indulgent, it is questioned by many as a relevant method of academic writing (Gingrich-Philbrook 11-12). However, because it is consciously grounded in experience, autoethnography gives the writer access to data that might otherwise remain inaccessible when observing from a distance (Carolan, Chase, Koch, Richardson). Yet “it can become one of the most challenging qualitative approaches to attempt” (Wall 1). This thesis documents an insider’s view of what it is like to be an outsider in a new unfamiliar space. As someone previously trained as a designer, the text reflects the shifts I experienced as my practice moved closer to being that of an artist. I also reflect on the uncertainty that emerges as I entered a new educational experience.

The text is written over a period of four months, from the beginning of November 2007 to the beginning of March 2008. In “The Laugh of the Medusa” Hélène Cixous refers to the notion of ‘fragmented voice’ (1524-1536), which I felt paralleled my thoughts and ideas when I was working with the text. I felt fragmented being in one place while wanting to be in another, thinking in two or more languages at the same time. Sometimes I felt like I was in a film and I was only watching and not participating in what was going on around me. At times I even thought on several occasions that people everywhere were speaking Icelandic, when of course they were not. The sense of fragmentation also comes from continuous doubt about myself. What was I doing here? Why did I think I could do this? The hesitancy that followed generated many half-finished thoughts and fragments. The structure of those thoughts easily made their way into my writing and in fact they took over. This essay was a means of working through my understanding of the academic expectations of an institution and of negotiating my way through research. I discovered that the writing process was a medium for composing and recomposing a self. It allowed for the words on paper to reflect back a sense of self thus enabling me to gain awareness.

I began with locating my walking and the feelings and thoughts it was evoking. Walks take place within specific spaces. Yet they do not always define them (Certeau in Mueller). Walking is an embodiment of space and time. It moves you through landscape or cityscape at a very different pace than other modes of transportation. The slowness of walking is meditative (Solnit 14-29). For this reason I chose to use my walking as a method of creating. It mostly took place during my first year spent here in Vancouver. At



first it was a way of spending my time, that is, filling time with experience. But quickly it evolved into a meditative and reflexive way of being in a new place. Interacting with a new space in a slow and deliberate way allowed me to understand my surroundings and become more comfortable with myself. Numerous artists, such as Janet Cardiff, Patricia Johanson and Uwe and Marina Abramovic, have in various ways explored the notion of embodiment. However, due to space constraints, I chose in this thesis to refer to the work of only three artists to contextualize my walking/thinking/making practice.

There is an undeniable performative aspect to walking as well as to writing. Both can be open-ended without always suggesting a final destination or a conclusion, Instead both can suggest a mode of connecting and locating people and places (Gingrich-Philbrook 13). I selected to focus on the exploratory aspect of my experience and reflect, through writing and photography, in order to gain clarity into this research project as it evolved. Throughout this whole process I was well aware that writing as a performative act can be like treading on thin ice within an academic institution. As Gingrich-Philbrook states “Fear of losing disciplinary control over sanctioned forms and content triggers a talk of legitimacy” (Pelias 6). It is that sense of walking on thin ice, the vulnerability, the lack of assurance engendered by the approach I took that permeates the text. My aim was not to prove or disprove, as quantifiable data, numbers, hypothetical reasoning can do but instead to reveal some of the dimensions of my experience to the reader/viewer.

Walking over a sustained period of time and in a new geographical location offered me a way of paying attention to my thoughts, making me aware of how thinking and walking were inextricably connected. It became progressively clear that the walking was definitely not about this place, the city of Vancouver, but more about the

embodiment of space and time. During this transition or transformation, from a simple walk to an embodied experience documented in words, I witnessed a change in myself, in my sense of identity. And gradually the words became material and a part of my practice, which until now had mostly been about objects and images. I became conscious of my writing as a space of transformation.

In another section of the paper I refer to the work of three artists whose individual practices particularly resonate with what I was experiencing. Since all three of these artists are male, I could have explored in this text the implications of their respective practice in relation to my own as a female artist/researcher/walker. As Wilson states, “the presence of women in cities, and particularly in city streets, has been questioned, and the controlling and surveillance aspects of city life have always been directed particularly at women” (Mueller 3). Throughout my walking, I am conscious of making decisions about which direction to take. As I express later in this thesis, “Once you get a feel for a place, you get a feel for where you want to be. And don’t want to be. Temporary feelings. Working through hunches” (10). Aware that the freedom that I have experienced during my walking throughout the city, public parks and sometimes secluded areas, was likely due to the impact of feminist theorists and activists who have questioned the privileged position that males occupy in public spaces, I could have situated my own experience within a feminist discourse (Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray). However I decided to focus my thesis on a more holistic overview of my experience, specifically examining the changes and evolution that took place during the time I spent as a student in the masters program at Emily Carr Institute and living in Vancouver.

In the thesis the ambiguous relationship between perception and reality is always close at hand. Feeling unsure about identity and insecure about my practice as an artist made me feel vulnerable which gave way to a messy text, a text that I literally cut up into pieces so that I could move it around and piece it back together to make it make sense. I wanted to convey to the reader the feeling of unfinished thoughts, hints of pathways or choices taken or not taken. A liminal space is hard to define or to describe since its borders are never clearly articulated. In this fragmented text and in this way of writing, I intended to leave room for the reader to find both familiarity and ‘discomfort’.

Walking things off became a way of coping. With all the possible paths to follow when it comes to walking and writing, I chose to focus on my exploration of self in an unfamiliar environment using reflexive writing to gain some understanding of what I did, of what I wrote and how others might interpret my words and my images (Jenks in Smith 4), as a method that allowed my experiences to become valid data (Smith 6). Intentionally writing my experience in fragmented sentences, I suggest, was a way to convey the fragmentary aspects of my experience rather than shaping the text according to more academic conventions. That approach served to articulate my own experience, specifically by breaking out of the dominant way of knowing in resistance and subversion and in a self-reflective, ironic and sometimes sad way.

## **Situating**

Creating a zone. Fencing off. Articulating what I've been going through. Taking a stand. Still not knowing where I am. Describing two years in 8000 words. Using text. Writing. A different kind of writing. Reflexivity. "[I]nterpretation exists in a complex matrix of alternative representations" (Koch 888). Attempting. Trying. Situating. Touching upon the work of three artists. Many things get left out. Just a few things are still there. Pick and choose. Subjective and objective. "Recognize that knowledge is partial and situated." (Haraway in Malterud 484). Edit and cut out. Yes it's difficult but essential if I want to make a point. But there is no single point to be made.

I did this on my own merit. Using the methods of auto-ethnography to document my actions. Using methods I've been resisting for a year. Writing my way to learn about myself and my research topic: me (Richardson 959). Writing is thinking. Writing is analysis. Writing is discovery (967). Moving into my own impossibility, where anything will happen (973). So many suggestions and polite smiles. Breaking down walls. My walls. With the help of friends. Jumping one edge after another. Seeing what happens. It contorts your soul. Reflexivity of discomfort (Pillow 187). Leaves you feeling empty and full. Scared and afraid. Lost. Under attack. A self inflicted battle. I don't know how to do this. Making it up as I go along. Knowing full-well there are sources. But do they apply? Was this what I hoped to accomplish?

What I have done is dive deep. Dive deeply within myself. Myself in this new place. Evoking deeper parts of self. Enhancing. Altering my sense of identity (Richardson 965). Using the outsider's perspective. Sharing preconceptions (Malterud 484). Knowing "something without claiming to know everything" (Richardson 961). With a shifting and

contradictory subjectivity (962). Asking questions. Small questions. Big questions. Looking through the lens of my own philosophy (Carolan 13). In hopes of finding answers. And knowing there are none. Looking back at what I've been doing. Taking all these photographs. Only not to show them. Demanding answers from myself.

Where is your place? Are you a photographer? Are you an artist? What? What will you do with all the photos?

There are endless narratives to be told. Only to pick one, would be to leave other ones out. So I might have to make a new one. Understanding through thought, experience. The representation of reality. How to evaluate my experience (Chase 656). Making sense of it (664). Just like this text. Making room for the audience. Showing not telling (Denzin in Chase 660). Flexible. Variable. Interacting with the reader (Chase 657). Asking you to look beyond my words. Messy, just like everyday lived experience (659). Not looking for comfortable, transcendent conclusions. Leaving the reader in an uncomfortable reality (Pillow 193). An instance. A narrative. A relationship between a construction of self and social, cultural, and historical surroundings (Chase 667). Self and reality construction in a particular time and place (671).

It's almost done.

Over.

→

## **The Beginning of the Beginning**

I remember walking. We walked so much. Everything was just over there, just around the corner. Very close. So we would walk. Walk to the store. Walk downtown. Walk to school. Walk to practice. Walk in the country. Walk to Grandma. Walk home. It was simply not as complicated. Easier. Less fuss. Open to changes, manipulations. Not limited by rules and signs or predetermined routes. Your own boss. Your decision. No one else's. Weather was rarely an issue. Even less now. I'm from Iceland. There is no wind in Vancouver. But walking usually takes more time. It takes planning. Pacing. Pacing yourself. Different speeds. Non-relevant when you are alone. Walking with others is different. A vivid memory of a winter hike up a mountain. The only girl. I remember the long stepping between the footsteps made in the snow. The footsteps have melted away, only retained in my mind.

But there are rules and limitations. Viewing these as non-restrictive is freeing. You know them so well they become irrelevant. Still they are there, present, all around. More or less limiting. Freed by the rules. Your journey can be dictated by limits. Give it a certain flavor. Something you cannot impose. Unconscious limits. Coming to your attention later. Giving a different perspective. The walk was not what you think it was. It's something else. An expression. An experience. An enrichment. A lesson not learned. Makes it stay with you longer. Unforgettable. For a while. Then melting away into time. Gathering dust until reminders pop up. You have been here before. Why not go this way? No, stay the course. Keep away. Consciousness affected by unconsciousness. Trusting. Instincts that know better than your logical mind. It has all been mapped out. You just don't have the information. Maybe someday you will get an update. Until then. It's

onwards. Towards the unknown. Embracing the unknown. Welcoming the unknown. Using the unknown. Hard work. Exploring any possibility you can imagine. When to stop. When to go. Reasons. Outcome.

Me walking. I walk to not get bored. I walk because I know I'll get depressed staying inside. Walking is my process. My process of getting through, of living. Severe doubts. Endless thoughts of making mistakes. Not being sure. Doubting, doubting, doubting. Just letting it all go, jump over the pile and see what happens. Always testing the waters. How far will I go before I stop myself? How much control do I give others? I want all the control. Control, complete control. Walking. No one tells me where to go. Complicated limits. I want to continue. I don't put myself at risk or in danger.

Once you get a feel for a place, you get a feel for where you want to be. And don't want to be. Temporary feelings. Working through hunches. The limits are no longer limiting: it's about interest, comfort, understanding, feeling, walking. Walking to become comfortable.

I did it once before, at least once. I was ten, uncertain, afraid, not alone. I made myself alone. Like I've done here. Brave. You need some amount of courage to keep doing what you want to do. Then you get comfortable. Forget all about bravery. Physical courage versus what? My walking has made me or prepared me for the next step. I can shift my focus to what I'm doing. Besides walking. Walking is the foundation. It has helped me settle in physically, it continues to be the basis of my work. My process. Determined. I go for walks. Weather, season, where I've been, mood, where I went last time I went, what I've done in the meantime. All contribute to where I go, what turns I

make. Ultimately creating my own city. Grid. Creating my own Iceland within Vancouver, within Canada. The geology of the city. Lost landscape, lost streams, lost shoreline. Lost but not longed for. Just changed. Developed. I cannot really say that I miss these things. Yet I go in search of them. Try to see where a stream used to run and imagine how trees covered a ridge. Hills, ridges, flats, bogs, trees, mountain. Only the ground is mostly original. The foundation the city is built upon. The surface has been changed. I look mostly the same. But the inside is different.

Walking is a state of mind. Meditation. Escape. Relaxation. Self time. Walk, walk, walk, walk, walk, walk a lot. Sometimes the same places, over and over and over again. Meaning of places when I walk. Important stops. Distance between stops. Destination unknown. Enjoying the unknown. Work, work. Be somewhat surprised by the outcome. Don't be dependant on the outcome. Along the way, some significant markers. All good things come to an end. Depends on perspective. Completely out of my element. Góðir hlutir gerast hægt. The mix of languages, culture, humor, opinions. Being open to *everything* is wearing. It breaks you down. You try to get away. To a safe place. Behind my camera, walking, listening to music.

I'll be the first to admit that burying myself between the left and right headphone is just another way of escaping.

Mapping walks. Reading information. Getting information about the past. How much information can you take in? Spectator. Spectacle. Everything you do contributes to outcomes, suggestions. It's a part of the journey. Where you're going. Without input there is no output. Not everyone can read, not everyone can write. It's terribly draining to continually worry about the outcome, about not conforming to standards. It's limiting.



A cookie factory. Be aware of different intelligence. Becoming aware of how mine works. Not being able to *see through* texts but able to find my mom in a supermarket at age four. Nurturing what you're given and respecting it. Using it. Attempting other things as well. Enjoy what you can enjoy, when you can. It still can be things that scare you. Going places you've never been before. Meeting people you don't know.

You cannot force empirical knowledge. It isn't under your control. Don't pretend that it is. It's not transparent. Not something I can write down. I can only describe.

Bring people along for the walk.

Walking isn't pretentious. Usually. Depends. Don't preach. Suggest possibilities. Hidden possibilities. Unknown possibilities. Embracing the unknown. Going for a walk without destination. No reason. Not to clear your head. Not to gather your thoughts. Whatever may happen let it happen. Let things come to you. Enrich. Yourself. Give back. Talk. You see something. Others don't. No judgment. No reasons. No solutions. Just walk. Wear good shoes. Don't let weather stop you. Don't get lost. Don't be afraid. Know your terrain. Places you don't want to be. Respect your limits. Move through. Walk in a straight line. Walk in a circle. Walk in a square. Zigzag. Go by your gut. Respect the signs. Just go for a walk. Time doesn't matter. Only your feeling. Your mood. Push a little further and go there.

Just to see what's behind that next hill. Open up to the surroundings. Take nothing but observe. Love it, like it, hate it, bear with it and move on. Watch yourself adjust. Live in the moment. Preserve the ephemeral. Keep walking until you can't go further. Wonder, ponder, think, note. Don't give up. Keep going. Keep up. Keep up with yourself.

Nextsteppingforever. Amaze. Impress. Give back. Tell others. Bring others. Go alone.

Leave the plans at home. Be by yourself. Know where you have been. Remember places. Go there again or stay away. Once is enough. Know your surroundings. Get to know your surroundings. Bring an umbrella. Feel the directions. Sun, clouds, wind. Smell the rain. Feel the change in weather. Use your knowledge. Don't preach to others. Share. Don't share. Just feel. Trust. Be surprised. Know that you will not know. Accept that you will not know. Don't pretend. Go with it when you go for a walk. Look up. Look down. Look back. Did I miss something? Is it gone or can I still catch it? Leave it. Move on. One moment at a time. No regrets. Embrace the next one. Live in it. And keep walking. Experience, enrich, embrace, enjoy. It is all about me. But I'm not alone. Everything surrounds me. Free and enclosed. Embrace and accept.

Break through the feeling. Images you can draw from. Several images. One for each mood. Put them where they fit. The best ones that speak to you. Maybe it will speak to someone else as well. Good. Bad. Yours. No. Share. It's a map. A map of where you have been, where you want to be, where you do not know where where is. Maps are information. They are for remembering. Like treasure maps. Finding again. For the hunt. Not so accurate. Hinting. Open to interpretation. Mean different things to different people. Walk according to a map. Walk without a map. Compare. Revise the map. Improve it. Find your own way. Way find. Create your map around you. Make the strange familiar. Get comfortable. Isolate. Break down. Discover the limits. Map it all out. Be cheesy, be romantic. Pretend to be yourself. Build up layers. Peel away layers. Figure it out. Move on. Go for a walk. Walk until you stop. Then walk back. Take a different route. Take the same route. Go with the flow. Or just take the bus.

## Self-Installation

There have been a lot of walkers through history. Some walk out of necessity, some for specific reasons. My necessity is my addiction. Being outdoors. My reason to partly pass time. I had quite some free time on my hands when I first came to Vancouver. I spent a lot of time at school, sitting in on various classes and using school resources. But I was alone. My classmates all had lives to return to when school was out. It was quite strange not to have a *life*. So I made one up. And walked to get there.

Photography has followed me for some years now. It was just normal to bring the camera and take pictures. Then I could show others, especially the people back home, what I was doing. That I was doing something. It is exciting to move to another country and excitement and anxiety go hand in hand. People worry about you, if you will be ok. They don't like the thought of you being out there on your own. I always keep that in mind. It's not a very heavy thought but it is there. I knew when I came it was going to take a while. So when I say I was passing time by walking and taking pictures it was just my way of getting through this *waiting* period. My way of being patient. Letting things happen. Just observing. Now I don't really want to go back.

My method of walking lead me on a quest for artists. Artists that have used walking in their art. It took me quite a while to find something that spoke to me. What have others done? The work of some have truly inspired me, while others have discouraged me. What am I doing? I like to think that with my images I open up possibilities of reading or interpretation of surroundings. "The little you can do as an artist, is to offer for a few minutes or a few seconds another reading or observation" (Johnson 2). The British artist Hamish Fulton describes his work using text and

photographs. Yet the artwork itself are his walks. The walks that are in the past. There is no way for the viewer to truly experience the walk itself. A one time only thing. This is somewhat how I feel about my walking. They are not to be replicated. They are very personal. So far. They have been about my experience. About me creating my comfort zone. I didn't worry too much about not finding references to situate myself and what I was doing. I even felt like it would somehow hinder my experience of the city and me being in the city. It also has to do with me hitting walls when reading. Not the words so much. Rather my interpretation of them. I find many of the texts I have come across fascinating and at the same time frustrating. Because I know I'm missing something. Missing something that would be useful to me in my quest. My treasure hunt.

Then there are breakthroughs. You meet new people. They get to know you. They have great suggestions. Or you start hearing what others have been telling you all along. Names that come up again and again. Haunting you when you move through your research. You're searching for one thing and another pops up. I had for a long time been collecting articles about things that I thought would inform me about my walking. Graduate studies carry enough worries as it is. It's serious business that you can't take too seriously. It's a narrow path to follow. Cloud-spotter. Same things again and again.

I know that when I start working, I work very hard. Focus easily. But I need to know what I'm going to do. Which really goes against everything I have been doing for the past year. There will be an outcome. Just not an endpoint. This is why I turned to the books. Tired of floating in space not knowing where I'm going. I'm throwing out my anchor, seeing if I'll find a footing. As Henry David Thoreau put it: "If you have built

castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundation under them” (*Walden*, 171). Find my place among others. What others do and have done.

Several times it has been suggested to me to use text with the photographs. What do I think when I look at my photographs? What comes to mind? There is always something. Words. Sentences. Stories. There is a connection. “Formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with culture, a moral, and imagination. Formerly, there was a reduction from text to image; today, there is amplification from the one to the other” (*Image, Music, Text* 26). Barthes wrote this quite some time ago referring to the press photo. Perhaps my images should be read like press photos? Images showing something that others might be interested in. Giving others a chance to experience the world around them differently. Mixing text in with my photographs can impact my work in many ways. And I do not find that as appealing as using the standalone images in groups as narratives. “A world of fables, and the space that separates them is a distance to be traveled without the illusion of final destination. A perfect distance for a stroll” (Basualdo 3).

I can’t really say that I have completely moved to this city. It’s more like visiting. It actually frustrates me. I’ve spent enough time familiarizing me with this new place. Settling in. Yet I keep thinking I will go back home to Iceland. I went home for Christmas after the first semester. Had severe doubts about what I was doing in Vancouver. Returned, stayed throughout the summer and went home for the holidays the second time. It’s traditional to come home for Christmas while studying abroad yet I felt

a certain reluctance about returning that time. Maybe someday I will experience Christmas away from Iceland. In the meantime I will miss it.

My whole stay here in Vancouver has been about resistance. Planning out my two years here. Knowing what the outcome will be. Writing traditional academic papers. Regretting the way I choose to spend my time. Having to write a paper about an outcome that you're working towards not reaching is tough. Resisting the way I'm used to doing things, the way I'm used to working. Resisting conforming to the schools expectations. It's very unlike me. It's not me. Several discussions about how I want to work, how I want my work to be perceived. I have to be honest, sincere in what I do, what I put out. That is the only way I can do any work. I think I haven't produced much for so long because I might be afraid of opening up. Opening up to others about myself. If I am to be honest in my work, I have to put all of me in it, be completely honest. I don't think I'm afraid of the response. It's just the opening up. Writing this way probably helps. I keep in mind that someone will read it. Even with that knowledge it's easier to write the words than to make the work.

It's time to let go of the resistance. Not to say that I will start to follow the norms again. But now that I know how it feels, I can construct my own norms. My own sense of being. Maybe I should find the designer again. The designer that made the non-electrical glucose chandelier.

It's not exactly about the walking per se. It's about me. Finding me. Understanding me. Getting to know me. Finding out what I want. How I work. What I need. What I don't need. I had to get away to do this. There is no way I could have

achieved it in Iceland. I was well on my way within the walls of my undergrad. Isolated with my peers. Thinking, sharing, conversing. I need somehow to be in that space. Not the protected space of the institution but this space of people. That's what I need. Feeling I belong. Not having doubts about fitting in. Being myself all the time. And discovering new sides of myself all the time. Writing this is an important part of figuring it out. Possibly will not even make it to the final written paper. Instead it will inform my work, written or otherwise realized. It will inform me about who I am and what I want to be. And how to get there.

Finally something. Something that has been brewing around inside my head for such a long time. Some of it is in words.

## **Others**

It took me a while to get on the right track. Once there things started falling into place. Coincidences turned to signposts. Connected signposts. Leading the way. Might be the wrong way. But it's better than a standstill. You have to start somewhere. Obscure references. Hints and suggestions from others. Same names all over the place. Some walkers have stuck with me for longer than others. Focusing in. Choosing. Finding parallels. Hesitant yet drawn in. There is something about the work of the walkers I've opted to explore further. Some undetermined angle. Indefinable but compelling. In my words.

Walking. Using walking. Walks. Writing, thinking, meditating. And art. Artists that walk. Artists that use walking. Walking as medium. Recording actions. Mostly outdoors. Remembering pasts. Directing viewers. A process. Letting others join. Sharing experience. Not just displaying outcome. Joining each other. Working together. Walking. Connecting artists. Walking artists working with the general public. Bringing together nearly forgotten knowledge. Handing it over to everyone. To enjoy. To take in. To give to others. Past wisdom carried on. Towards understanding.

Walking artists. Francis Alÿs. Hamish Fulton. Richard Long. Different approaches. Different outcomes. Alÿs, a Belgian in Mexico city. A foreigner. An immigrant. An artist by accident (Patrick 1). A collaborator. Working with situations on an ephemeral level. Works on the street. With the people on the street. Makes fun of himself. "I think what I'm trying to do is twist the plot, so that people can look at the situation from a different perspective" (Johnson 3). Draws attention to the temporal state of things. Makes you



think. Finds the weak points. The brutal implications of city life (Feeke 2). Makes others aware of situations. Addresses issues. Always the outsider. Not really a participant. An initiator. Starts a discussion. Playing off of recent and old events. Emphasizing his works of art with his walks. Underlying importance of movement. No real conclusions. Repetitions. Improvising as an approach to making art (Johnson 2). Setting up scenes. Inventing tiny narratives. Setting stories loose. Seeing what happens. Using props. Documenting the outcome with video and photos. Art adopts a life of its own (2). What happens next? "It's kind of bizarre, but you can physically feel the shift, if you want, around you, the way somebody just creates a moment of doubt" (3).

Getting to know or understand a place. Place, culture, idea. Impenetrable before. Potential in the moments of doubt. Planned actions. Yet not taking the most obvious route to an endpoint. Get sidetracked, make pit stops. Turn around. Contradict yourself. Interpretations open to your wishes. No rules apply. It's up to you, the viewer. No rights or wrongs. Not even a certain result. Sometimes the artist is missing. Just leaves a trace. Brings up questions. Did the action (walk) take place or not? Does it matter? A fable. A walk that is a story of a walk. A mix of fantasy and actuality. What is true? What is reality (Basualdo 1)? Like the situationists. Drifting through the streets. Creating situations. Taking over places. A part of Paris May '68 (*On the Passage of a few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*). Critiquing the modern city (Basualdo 3).

Alÿs does it without melancholy though. Devoid of the *original experience*. Having everything mapped out. Finding the hidden personality of a city. Uncovering the spectacle. Alÿs's work leaves you with half truths, white lies. (Basualdo 3). "At once involved and detached..." (Feeke 5). Engaging with political and social aspects of his

adopted city. Looking around. Finding circumstances to react to. Taking in information. Studying. Contemplating. Digesting. Walking. An outsider protected by his camera. A justification of presence in a place. (Patrick 1) The result of actions. Alÿs situating himself in a moving environment. Big or time-consuming pieces. Only evidence might be a single photograph of the artist's feet (Patrick 3).

Photographs are my evidence. In a place I take a photograph. Look, limit, frame and perspectivize (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 10). Feeling like there isn't anything special about what I capture. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes looks at what is specific to the photograph as a means of representation from the spectators and the 'target's' point of view (Price 29). But I'm the photographer and rarely a subject of my own photographs. "... any sense of self-location through the contemplation of the photographic image is temporary" (Wells 288). So far I haven't really used my photographs to make any kind of statement. Like giving them titles. "... the caption does not simply anchor; writing constitutes a further signifier within the complex interaction of discourses with which the spectator engages. ... Titles, or captions, simultaneously anchor, and become implicated in, play of meaning" (Wells 284). Giving more than just a subjective value for me.

Maybe that is why photographs of others don't matter as much for me. I don't feel a connection. A personal connection: personal history. Artists in the family. Surrounded by connections. Afraid there is nothing there. "[A] photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 5). Doesn't matter if the photograph itself exists or not. Doesn't affect the subject. The message is the subject. The

subject is more important. Lends value to a photograph. I know I have a photograph of a sign because I know I have taken a photograph of a sign. I have the memory of being places because I took the photographs. Despite the fact I never print them out to hold the physical object in my hand. The memory of taking the picture. Even if I don't remember the place right away. But looking through the viewfinder. I've been here before. When I frame. Similar framing. Know the place again. That's me creating. A specific point of view. My point of view. An identity of an artist? Everyone sees things their own way. Like in music. Feeling you've heard it before. You get to know the workmanship. I'm making, finding, understanding my own. I know that I have taken a photograph. That's what gives the place value. Subjective value. Probably just for me. Unlike a painting where arguably the unique object carries more worth. Objective value. According to Barthes "Photography is unclassifiable because there is no reason to *mark* this or that of its occurrences; ... Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (*Camera Lucida* 6).

I don't change the places where I've been. I only leave my fleeting presence and then move on. Anonymous. Untraceable. Hidden. Taking everything. No clues as to where I'm heading. A hint of a memory. I've been here before. Maybe it was somewhere similar. No it was here. Or not. Richard Long. An artist that chooses to leave his mark. Land art. A twelve day walk in the mountains of Ladakh (Long). Marks along the way. On the path itself. "Walking within walking" (Long *Mirage* Interview with Mario Codognato). Creating. Moving on. Leaving traces. Opposite to Hamish Fulton who leaves everything as he finds it. "It is harder to leave things alone than to change them"

(Fulton in Tufnell 108). Long even transports places. Into galleries. Or makes small adjustments to the landscape. While walking. No one in sight. Not to be found. Romey says focus on the process of interaction with landscape, not on a created product (456). Days and weeks spent walking. Different places. Different countries. Like Alÿs, Long is met with distinct cultural and social conditions everywhere. Yet not as engaging. Not as obvious. A solitary walker. Working alone. Having a mission. A plan. Marking progress on maps. Taking photographs. Views other photographers have missed. The path. A rock. Steps as artwork. Repeated steps as artwork. Framing a subject means excluding something. You choose.

What you look at speaks of your background. What you know. What is left out? The too familiar. Not strange enough. Edit. Emphasize. Isolate. Find your *punctum* within a scene (Barthes in Price 29-30). Communicate the puzzling environment you're in. Communicate to those who aren't here. Create your own big picture. Create a space where you belong. Without contact. Only a fading recollection. Long's inconsequential changes to surroundings. Snapping heads of dandelions. Documenting afterwards. Drawing lines through campsites. Experimentation with representations. Maps accompanied by photographs. The making, not the product. Long using a "map as a metaphoric vehicle to express the feeling of [journey]" (Romey 455). Wandering with an aim. Predefined strategy. Walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours. One day's walk south (Romey 452-4). Resulting artwork varies from images, to maps, to pieces of land.

Sometimes the title of a photo carries the biggest value. Strange rocks arranged in a row accompanied by *Dry Walk. 113 Walking Miles Between One Shower of Rain and the Next. Avon England 1989* (Long *Mirage*). The only important result. Often there seems to

be no determined outcome. The walk is the artwork. The only thing that matters.

Environment as subject and medium (Haldane 12). Places, landscapes, details, actions, possessions, objects, roads, trails, phenomena. A documentation of a trip. Simple photographs. Text overlays. Describing images. Thoughts, objects in pictures, activity, place, observations. A personal relationship between artist and environment. “The sculptural intervention ameliorates, deteriorates, and becomes reabsorbed within the environment. Ultimately only the picture remains” (Wells 280). An individual and world.

Fellow walkers. A quest. A meditation. Finding connections. Between you and what surrounds you. What you surround you with. A mix of admiration, observation and manipulation. From both sides. A passage through place and time. A part of a life.

Constitutes a life if repeated often enough. A simple walk of life. Ever continuing. Not knowing the end. Doing your best. Coming up with suggestions along the way.

Suggestions open to interpretation. Yours but shared. A place in the past. Brought forth.

Contemplate. Imagine. Transcend space. Go there. An invitation. Make up your mind. If you want to, you can. Join in. Carried by your mind. Not worrying about anything.

Stepping over the border. Transported to another place. Breathe the air. Leave your mark.

Let them know you were there. Here. Feel the weather. Walk along.

So many similarities. So close but so far. Interpretations. Understandings.

Conclusions. No, propositions. Invitation to a collaboration. Unconfirmed documentation. What you see is what you get. Unless . . . You wouldn't, would you?

Totally up to you. Get sucked up into the world before you. Or resist until you can get away. Give in. Be tempted. Take responsibility for your imagination. See if you can live

up to it. All from a single image. An image that represents so much. Endless possibilities. No dead ends. Just bright open roads. Heavy winds and gray clouds won't scare you away. They suck you in. Like a gateway. Opened by the artist. Open for you and me to enter. You'll never know if you don't jump. Taking the first step. Making the first move. No wrong, unsuitable understanding. No specific meaning. Yours. Shared or private. Like the artwork itself. Walk-art. "Facts for the walker and fictions for everyone else" (Deuchar 15). Celebration of landscape. Remember and reminisce past events. Inscribe feelings, thoughts, desires onto images.

It's about walking. Not land art. Not outdoor sculpture. Hamish Fulton: "The differences centre around either constructing something or nothing in the landscape. What I build is an experience, not a sculpture. My wish is to leave as few traces of my passing as possible. My walking experiences are the reverse of creating sculptural changes, subtractions or additions to the land" (Tufnell 16). Doing things differently. Making decisions and sticking to them. Choose and reject. Do your own thing. Influenced by everything and nothing. Fearless determination fused with unceasing doubt. Moving one step at a time. Cautious and vigilant. Mindful of every move. "Fulton . . . is an artist whose chosen form of expression is the walk" (Tufnell 16). The walking artist Hamish Fulton responds to current issues in his work. One of the most crucial today - environmental debates. "In an indirect way, without preaching, he encourages us to reconsider our personal relationship with nature" (Tufnell 17). Not a protest. An alternative model. Man and nature. Awareness. Bringing the experience back with him. His own responses. Letting the viewer in on it (Wilson 20). Everything interconnected.

"A walk must be experienced it cannot be imagined" (Fulton in Wilson 21).

Misinterpretations. Too hard to imagine. Not for everyone. A choice to be a part of an experience. A work of art that almost isn't there. A merging of the mind with the outside world.

Landmarks as places, time, distances (Wilson 31). Views. Skylines. Greater than the self. "Nothing stays the same. Everything is changing. One thing leads to another. Here we go again" (Fulton in Wilson 31). Out of reach. Unknown. Momentary. Connected moments. Impossible to document. Stand-ins (Wilson 26-27). Live by conviction. Occupied with notions that truly interest you. Disregard fabricated pressures of closed worlds. Feel free to do nothing. Feel a need to do something. In between yourself and yourself. It can go either way. Almost no selection to be made. Feels predetermined. Out of your control. So you go with it.

## **Two hundred and Thirty-four and One Hundred Fifty-Three Photographs**

A corner. An intersection. Open in every direction. Where to? Yesterday I went this way. Maybe . . . Clouds moving in. East. Long straight street. No winding or bending. I need that now. South. The hill. It's not that hard. Now what. West? The trees are huge. So many. Covering. Making a cave, a room. Comfortable. Traffic. I need more trees.

Definitely west. No intentional thinking, just kind of inching along the city floor. Side street. Side street. Lots of side streets. Doors to different corridors. Talking in my ear.

Telling me what is happening. I'm not part of it. I'm just drifting under trees. Snapping here. Snapping there. More clouds moving. The sunlight. Stop.           What if I turn around? No. Keep going. Long, long hill. A mountain. Thinking about the view from the top. What waits on the other side. No more trees. Open field of houses and cars.

Flourishing in sunlight. Now I can see them. Let's make a left. A hill on a hill. The view must be amazing. Little bit further. Finally more trees. I forget to look back. Let's get lost.

No more sounds. Just my sounds. Sun rays. Everywhere. Photographs. Photographer?

Where do I fit in? Downhill. Inside. Among the trees. Inside a tree. Wait. Listen.

Swaying back and. More and more trees. I'm here with them. An outer interior. Me and them. Them and me. Them in me. Me in them.           Traffic.           Crossing.

Stop.                           View.

Corpses floating everywhere. Tied to each other. Waiting. I'm documenting. Walking.

Not creating. Someone else. No talking, just looking. Going back. Don't want to cross.

Wall on one side. River on another. Wall hiding the cellar. The inaccessible cellar. With all its treasures. Man made hindrances. Following the wall. Reaching a door among the trees. Make a left. It's vault. An expedition.           Darker.           Colder.           Worthwhile.



It's a long tunnel. No end in sight. Someone left the tap turned on. Is there a way out?  
Dead end? There is some light there. They are coming from there. Attention. Sound back  
on. Look there. Snap. There. Look. Glimpses of scenery. Between the  
trees. I'm on both sides. The walls can't hold my mind. Panorama through a passage wall.  
Free. Do they see it too? It's not over yet. There's more. Instant. Trees replaced. Identical  
construction. I know where I am. Too bad. Feet hurt. Come back. To their world. Little  
further. Taking the bus back.

Stepping up from the gate. It's clear. Go anywhere. This way or that. Doesn't  
matter. Open air everywhere. Up the hill. To the left. Endless straight lines. Nothing to  
divide the space. Until you look closer. There are signs, markers. To follow or to ignore.  
Follow. Keep going. Feels close. All of a sudden you  
don't want to go further. Left again. Down the hill. The air changes. Different smell.  
Buildings lower their gaze. Tops of buildings visible. Displays. Smell, sour, deep-fried.  
Turn around. Snap. Walk faster. Get through the fog quickly. A low  
branch. Climb it? Could take you far away. No. Continue. Not safe. Not  
comfortable. Houses closing in. Another branch. Path feels better. Colors sprouting from  
the sidewalks. Slow down. Wander. Smile. Smell. Smoke.  
First time experience. Never to be repeated exactly the same way. Right. Right. Right.  
Right. Onwards. Next block. Not letting any sound in. Just smelling and looking.

Stop.

It stinks. Dangerous. Feels scary. Move fast through the corral. Find an exit? Take it.  
Out. Away. Open fake green. Breathe. Beautiful open air. Embraced by the

confusion.

This way. It's ok. Just keep going. Now you know. The pull of the ocean. Just a few more steps. The side track. Love it. Following impulses. The leaves blowing alongside your steps. Being chased by nature in the desert.

Fragmented sparkles. Between the vertical lines. Go there. Persuaded by light. Find the door, unlock it and go outside. Even just for a while. It's there, the sea. With the forest behind you. You're in between. You are the in-between. Treading the separating line. Carefully. Participating in both the inner and outer. Wondering but aware. Sharing place and time, in your own space. What am I doing? A walker? An artist? Getting to know. Suspecting, gathering, sensing, understanding. Seeing it slip away. It's still there. Out of reach. Useful later. Stop. Reflection. Memory. Evidence.

Around on the boardwalk. Gray, yellow, blue, green. Red perpendicular lines, carefully moving colors up and down. Seduced by the green. You don't need to know where I am. Go to the other side. Follow the twilight. White to dark-blue. Away. Imaginably far away. Stretching shapes everywhere. Growing. Inhabiting more and more of your wide course. You know them. They are welcome. People wake you up. The paved path is there. You know where to go. Endure the walk back. No other way.

You went too far this time. Path becomes streets, intersections, traffic. Buildings shoot up from the surroundings. You use the sound to block. Trying to be alone. Enclosed space moving through the external. Every step felt. Like never before. One foot moves alone. The viscous air. Up the slope. Always up. Up and over. Down but up again.

You're back.

## Placing

Being from an edge. Coming to an edge. Edges on either side of a the same place. All linked through endless underlying landscape. Ridges, hills, mountains, rivers, oceans. Plains, fields, mesas. Forests, ranges, valleys. Scale. Different ratios. Almost the same feeling. Nonetheless noticing something strange. It wouldn't be right to feel the same so far away from home. There is something underneath. A sense of familiarity. Take away all the big trees. Take away the architecture. The language isn't that foreign. Coming from a place where a second language is almost a necessity. If you want to explore the world you have to be able to communicate. You won't get far speaking Icelandic. Glætan, spætan. And there are other things. In the air. Places on edges. Meeting. Departing. Crashing. Separating. Where uncontrollable natural phenomena take place. Witness to extremes. Knowing your inferiority. Against everything. Choose to be content. Choose to fight. Dealing with situations in you own way. Stand by yourself. Not letting anything come in between you and your destination. No matter how obscure your goal is. It can take you so far. Letting it take you is what matters. Doing everything, anything. Living. When you come from an island it's not hard to understand that you might want to get away. Isolated, but not forgotten. From the start we headed out into the world. Fame and fortune, education, perspective. If you wanted to be somebody that's what you did. We still do. Some never leave though. Some think they leave. And leave every year. But bring nothing back. They are content. Not challenging. Defying. Just content. Fulfilled. Yet there is so much more. If you get that far. And when you get there. It's the same. You become the strange one. The one that can't conform. Fit in. Follow the leader. Do as you're told. You become a rebel. By other's definition. The one who's trying to be

different. You could care. And you could not care. Just keep doing what you've been doing.

And that's what I've done.

I came to this place. To the other edge of the plate. Some things are still an interference. Others quickly became clear. Some I was even used to. But there is a difference. I've changed. But not according to the place. I've used the place. It's similar. A place on a border. A boundary. Where other cultures, spaces, times clash. Physically and figuratively. It's a place where two physical edges of the Earth come together. "Every image and idea about the world is compounded, then, of personal experience, learning, imagination, and memory" (Lowenthal 260). I come from the other side. Where an edge of this same plate is moving away from its neighbor (Glen 92-93). A more dramatic place though. It's been very hard to see active evidence here. I'm used to the nature roaring in my ear. There is always something. An earthquake. A volcanic eruption. A glacial river flood. Constant reminders. Steam rising from the ground. The distinct smell of the hot water from the tap. It has shaped me. Made me aware of nature as a powerful force. Not something that's just in the way. It's a means of viewing the world.

Transferring this view to this other side. Where the effect of what I grew up with should be evident. But it's suppressed. I don't see much. Not to the same extent I'm used to. Great mountain ranges. Hot springs here and there. It's a different kind of edge. Breeding different kind of people. Not the last minute fixes. Not the *it's all going to go somehow* attitude. Somehow more thick. From an outsider's perspective. Everyone has a place. Their role. You don't have to know how to do everything. Just your thing.

Contentment. Fulfilled life. Playing out your role. I quickly realized I didn't want to fit in. Coming from such an active place. Where it drives you to reach further and further. Feeling like you have no control over what might happen. So you better do it now. Do it fast. Do it yourself. No one is going to do it for you. It's up to you to get it done.

There is always the underlying power. The power of nature. Unpredictable. You get a warning. It's not that bad. But it also gives you energy. Energy that I've missed. In a geological zone without constant activity. Nothing to experience everyday. Makes you forget what's happening under your feet. It's easy. You let down your guard. I lost my energy. I felt I didn't have any ideas or the enthusiasm to act them out. Dampened. Too comfortable. In a rut. Nothing confronting me. No pressure. No threats. No expectations. Nothing. I stopped doing. Ingrained initiative got lost. I just walked. Slowed down. Almost to a halt.

But I got a reminder. So grateful for that reminder. Even if I was aware of what was happening. I simply wasn't doing anything about it. Just going with the flow. Too much. No regrets. Yet a feeling of a time wasted. Unconscious effects of a place. Muddled view. Metaphors mixed with scenery (Schama 61). Unawareness. The details might be interesting. But there is also the big picture. Keeps you moving. Active. Engaged. Fills you with vitality. Different spirit in people in this place. Not what I'm used to. A compromiser, assimilating non-energy. I didn't see it. Now I do. Definitely learned something. And that's a part of the experience. Where every minus is a plus. In the end you come out richer. You know something more about yourself.

There is also a great gap between an island and a continent. An island where you

are the indigenous one. History and heritage tightly woven into the social fabric you come from. And you don't want to break free. It's what makes you you. Part and whole. It is you. You. Your. Forever. Always. And you take it with you. History, customs, art, people, in a new place. Take up symbolic and mythic places in your own universal map (Green in Lowenthal 258). If there is life in the rocks and cliffs back home, there must be something similar here. You imagine that at least. It can't all be just man-made.

Constructed. Where is the history? What was here before? "You cannot see things until you know roughly what they are" (Lewis in Lowenthal 256). Are there any links that I can find? Connections to make me feel more comfortable. Not so alien. It's not going to be the city or the streets. Too different. Not the trees. So big and overpowering. That leaves the landscape. That's what I've been getting to know. By walking. Back home it's the landscape that shaped me. Who I am. I've always felt like if I knew my surroundings, I'd be ok. Unconsciously that's what I did here. I needed to know that I would be alright. "Creating order and organizing space, time and causality in accordance with our apperceptions and predilections" (Lowenthal 260). And I got to know the landscape. The almost familiar landscape. The other edge of this vast continental plate I was born on.

Essentially the same place but so far. Proof that it's not about place. It's about you in a place. Other people in that place. People around you. People that you miss having around you. Meeting new people. Accustomed people. Old space to them. Nothing to discover. Plain view. Open view. Closed view. Narrow view. " 'Quite often,' notes H. M. Tomlinson, 'our first impression of a place is also our last' " (Lowenthal 256). It's up to them to find out. Some have. Some don't want to. Others can't. I'm here for me. To broaden my horizon. And that is what I've done. Maybe see if there is something I can

bring back. Of course there is. It's a question of whether I want to. I don't know where I will go from here. Having been on both sides of one place. It's time to go elsewhere. Move away from self-exploration. Move away from this deep look at self. Swim upwards. Surface. Breathe deeply before moving on. Hopefully getting somewhere.

Where this will have been worth it.

## **No End In Sight**





Vancouver, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2008

Katrín Svana Eypórsdóttir

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