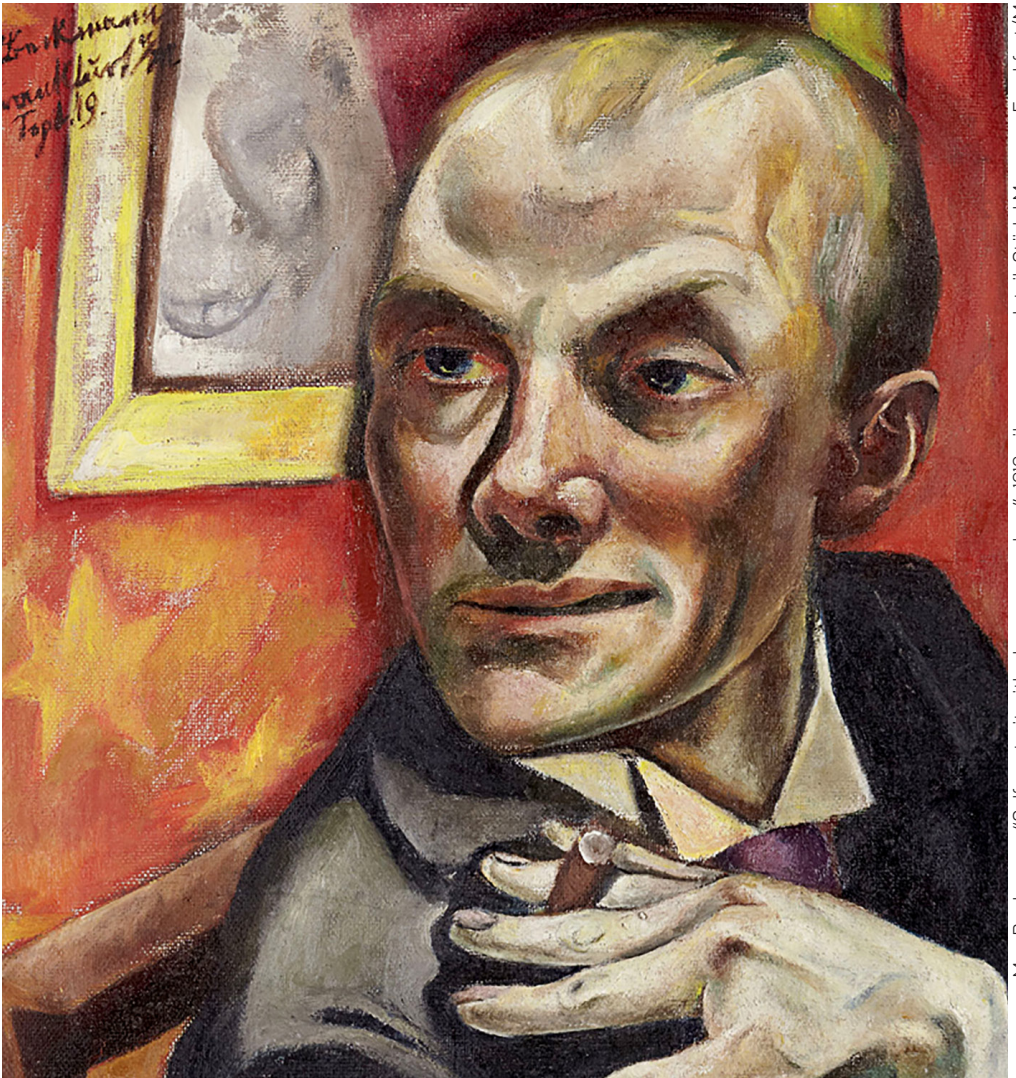


NEW THEORIES

TEORÍA PYAHU

NOVE TEORIJE

2/2021



Max Beckmann, "Self-portrait with champagne glass", 1919, oil on canvas, detail. Städel Museum, Frankfurt/M

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Abstract:

The approaches on walking, involving numerous fields of knowledge, can be divided into two large groups. The first one privileges a phenomenological point of view, concentrating their interest on the experience of space felt through walking. The second one gives birth to a critical reflection aimed at deconstructing the common representations and beliefs involved in any spatial experience. The so-called walking artists, that is, those artists who base their art entirely on walking, are situated in between these two groups, given that they conceive their artform either as a means of understanding the sensitive and affective dimension connected to the experience of walking, or as the privileged way to engage into a critical discussion concerning experience and space. In the first paragraph, I shall try to offer a description of this artform, mainly, but not exclusively, focusing on its major exponents, Richard Long and Hamish Fulton. The discussion will primarily concern their claim to artisticity, well expressed by Long's incisive statement "walking is an artform in its own right." Next, it will address the relationship that the experience of walking establishes between body and space. In considering the body—following Francesco Careri's suggestion—both as an "instrument of perception" and as a "tool for drawing" of the terrain or surrounding space traversed, the human body is always given, phenomenologically, as a

WALKING AS AN ART

EXPERIENCE, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, IMAGE

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condition of possibility of the space walked or, better still, of the space generated through walking. Subsequently, in the second paragraph, I shall try to shed light to some aspects of the socio-political engagement of the walking artists, in their explicit and implicit aspects. It is true that especially Fulton makes it clear that his art is “just art”, not “political art.” However, his stance in favor of some civil and ecological campaigns—from his interest in Arne Næss’ “deep ecology” to his advocacy for Tibet and Native Americans—had led to actions in which such engagement is explicit, like *Slowwalk* in defense of the artist Ai Weiwei. Additionally, and in a more general sense, it is walking as such that can be seen as an activity conveying *lato sensu* political implications: the defense of the slowness inherent in walking makes this artform a critical stance against the increasing acceleration of the contemporary technocratic and productivist world. Finally, in the third paragraph, I shall discuss some aporias that this artform brings with it and that have already been thematized by the artists themselves. The point here concerns the contradiction that seems to arise between an artform that can only be given as an experience, as such not sharable and not livable except by the walking person, and its communicability, which must necessarily take place through images or accounts, that is, by means of something totally other than the experience of walking. Such an aporia, sometimes imputed to the walking artists themselves, turns out, on closer inspection, to be a point of reflection for the artists, thus becoming one of the key points in the self-thematization of their artistic activity.

Keywords: Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Outdoors art, spatial experience, walking as artform

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Sažetak:

Pristupi hodanju, koji uključuju brojna znanstvena područja, mogu se podijeliti u dvije velike skupine. Prvi privilegira fenomenološko gledište, koncentrirajući svoj interes na doživljaj prostora koji se osjeća hodanjem. Drugi rađa kritičku refleksiju usmjerenu na dekonstrukciju uobičajenih reprezentacija i uvjerenja uključenih u bilo koje prostorno iskustvo. Takozvani umjetnici hodanja, odnosno oni umjetnici koji svoju umjetnost u potpunosti temelje na hodanju, smješteni su između ove dvije skupine, budući da svoju umjetničku formu poimaju ili kao sredstvo razumijevanja osjetljive i afektivne dimenzije povezane s iskustvom hodanja ili kao povlašten način uključivanja u kritičku raspravu o prostoru i iskustvu. U prvom odlomku pokušat ću ponuditi opis ove umjetničke forme, uglavnom, ali ne isključivo, usredotočujući se na njezine glavne predstavnike, Richarda Longa i Hamisha Fultona. Rasprava će se primarno odnositi na njihovo pozivanje na umjetnički aspekt, a što je dobro izraženo Longovom tvrdnjom „hodanje je umjetnička forma sama po sebi”. Zatim ću se pozabaviti odnosom koji iskustvo hodanja uspostavlja između tijela i prostora. U razmatranju tijela – prema sugestiji Francesca Carerija – i kao „instrumenta percepcije” i kao „alata za crtanje” terena ili okolnog prostora kojim se prolazi, ljudsko tijelo uvijek je dano, fenomenološki, kao uvjet mogućnosti postojanja ili, još bolje, hodanjem generiranog prostora. Potom

HODANJE KAO UMJETNOST ISKUSTVO, POLITIČKI ANGAŽMAN, SLIKA

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ću u drugom odlomku pokušati rasvijetliti neke aspekte društveno-političkog angažmana umjetnika hodanja, u njihovim eksplicitnim i implicitnim aspektima. Istina je da posebno Fulton jasno daje do znanja da je njegova umjetnost „samo umjetnost”, a ne „politička umjetnost”. Međutim, njegovo stajalište u korist nekih građanskih i ekoloških kampanja – od njegova interesa za „duboku ekologiju” Arnea Næssa do njegovog zagovaranja Tibeta i američkih domorodaca – dovelo je do akcija u kojima je takav angažman eksplicitan, poput rada „Slowwalk” kojim ovaj autor daje potporu umjetniku Aiju Weiweiju. Dodatno, i u općenitijem smislu, hodanje kao takvo može se promatrati kao aktivnost koja prenosi *lato sensu* političke implikacije: obrana sporosti svojstvene hodanju čini ovu umjetničku formu kritičkim stavom protiv sve većeg ubrzanja suvremenoga tehnokratskog i produktivističkog svijeta. Na kraju, u trećem odlomku, raspravljat ću o nekim aporijama koje sa sobom nosi ova umjetnička forma, a koje su sami umjetnici već tematizirali. Ovdje se radi o proturječju koje se javlja između umjetničkog oblika koji se može dati samo kao iskustvo – kao takvo koje se ne može podijeliti i ne može živjeti osim osobe koja hoda – i njegove komunikativnosti, koja se nužno mora odvijati kroz slike ili izvještaje, tj. pomoću nečega sasvim drugog od iskustva hodanja. Takva aporija, koju se ponekad pripisuje samim umjetnicima hodanja, kroz pomnije promatranje pokazuje se kao bitna odrednica njihova promišljanja, a time i jedna od ključnih točaka u samotematizaciji njihova umjetničkog djelovanja.

Ključne riječi: Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, umjetnost na otvorenom, iskustvo prostora, hodanje kao umjetnost

WALKING AS AN ART

EXPERIENCE, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, IMAGE

Luca Vargiu

The reflection on walking, as it is well known, involves various fields of knowledge and several disciplinary areas. In an introductory way, the different approaches on this issue can be divided into two large groups: on the one hand, there are those scholars who have privileged a phenomenological point of view, concentrating their interest on the experience of space felt through walking: think, for example, on the way Jean-Paul Sartre (1992) and Otto Friedrich Bollnow (2011), with reference to Kurt Lewin, have theorized the hodological space. On the other hand, there are those who, starting from the very practice of walking, give birth to a critical reflection aimed at deconstructing the common representations and beliefs involved in any spatial experience: think, for example, on the activities promoted by Lucius and Annemarie Burckhardt (2015) and by the group “Stalker” founded by Francesco Careri (2002).

The so-called walking artists, that is, those artists who base their art entirely on walking, are situated in between these two groups, given that they conceive their way of doing art and of being artists either as a means of understanding the sensitive and affective dimension connected to the experience of walking, or as the privileged way to engage into a critical discussion concerning experience and space, with social and political repercussions.

In the following pages, I shall first try to offer a description of this art-form, albeit far away from being exhaustive. To do this, I will focus mainly, but not exclusively, on Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, pio-

neers in the art of walking and still its major exponents. Subsequently, I shall try to shed light to some aspects of their socio-political engagement, in their explicit and implicit aspects. Finally, I shall discuss some aporias that this artform brings with it and that have already been thematized by the artists themselves.

1. “Walking is an artform in its own right”

We owe to Richard Long (English, b. 1945) and Hamish Fulton (English, b. 1946) the claim of the artistic meaning of their activity. Long (2007a, 73) is concise in stating: “I made the walking into art”. Fulton (in Giusti 2015a, 1:26) is equally resolute in claiming: “Walking is an artform in its own right”. As he adds, “My art form is the short journey made by walking in the landscape”; “The only thing we should take of a landscape are photographs. The only thing we should leave are footprints” (Fulton, quoted in Careri 2002, 145).

Long and Fulton are not the only walking artists. Together with them it is worth mentioning Michael Höpfner (Austrian, b. 1972), and—at least partially—David Tremlett (English, b. 1945), who shared with Long and Fulton part of his artistic education, Stanley Brouwn (Surinamese, 1935–2017), Danica Phelps (American, b. 1971), Francis Alÿs (Belgian, b. 1959), Massimo Antonaci (Italian, b. 1958) and Antonio Rovaldi (Italian, b. 1975). Other artistic actions or performances have also made use of walking: among the best known are *Wiener Spaziergang* (1965), the “Vienna Stroll” carried out by Günter Brus (Fig. 1), completely covered with paint, and *The Lovers* (1988), the march along the Chinese Wall performed by Marina Abramović and Ulay.¹ However, what matters is to understand whether the focus of all these actions is to be identified in walking as such, as in the artists mentioned above, or if the performances convey other meanings, as it is apparent in the latter cases of Brus and Abramović and Ulay. The same remark should in fact be advanced for several actions of Alÿs, such as *The Green Line* (2004): a performance on foot, but not limited to walking, as it consisted in the execution of a line of painting along the way.²

¹ On *Wiener Spaziergang* see Brus (1972). On Abramović and Ulay’s performance, see the documentary made by Murray Grigor, *The Great Wall: Lovers at the Brink* (65 mins., 1989).

² See the artist’s video, *The Green Line* (17 mins., 41 secs., 2004), <http://francisalys.com/the-green-line/>.



Fig. 1 Günther Brus, *Vienna Stroll*, 1965; photograph by Ludwig Hoffenreich

Walking artists are usually indexed under the label of Land art, even against their own intentions. Long's explicit statements in this regard have been cited several times:

Land art is an American expression. It means bulldozers and big projects. To me it seems like a typically American movement; it is the construction of works on land purchased by the artists with the aim of making a large, permanent monument. All this absolutely does not interest me (Long, quoted in Gintz 1986, 8).³

Fulton is equally explicit. He is ironic towards land artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Walter De Maria, whose art would be noth-

³ Translation taken from Careri (2002, 146).

ing but “a continuation of ‘Manifest Destiny’ ... the so-called ‘heroic conquest’ of nature” (Fulton, in Auping 1982, 87). Hence his statement “This is not land art”, written in various wall paintings tied to the climb to the summit of Denali, Alaska (2004), which was also the title of an exhibition that took place in Oslo in 2005.⁴

Incidentally, on this issue, the Italian philosopher Paolo D’Angelo has pointed out that “Land art” has become “an umbrella-term comprising very various artistic experiences, from the American Earth Art to the Art in Nature tendencies of the last years”. Nonetheless, following his suggestion, it makes sense to adopt the expression “Outdoors art” as “perhaps the only term really capable to gather, giving an important indication, *all* the recent tendencies concerning art in nature” (D’Angelo 2010, 70n1 and 71).⁵ In his acute book *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri considers as prototypical of this artform the night journey made by Tony Smith and then recalled by the same artist on the pages of *Artforum* in 1966 (Wagstaff 1995). Careri (2002, 121) sees it as the moment from which on “the practice of walking [began] to be transformed into a true autonomous artform”. However, Smith’s experience consisted in a car journey along a motorway under construction on the outskirts of New York; therefore, what lacks in it is precisely the act of walking. For this reason, properly speaking, it has nothing to do either with walking as an artistic practice or with walking as such: driving is a mechanical experience, walking is a somatic one (Jakob 2009, 113).

Rather, if we are in search of a prototypical moment, it is more convincing to refer to Long’s influential and decisive operation *A Line Made by Walking* (1967). Like numerous further interventions by the same artist, it consisted in nothing more than a straight line drawn on the ground simply by treading on grass (Fig. 2). Due to its radical simplicity, several critics have seen in it a fundamental moment in contemporary art: some have described it as “one of the most singular and revolutionary gestures of 20th century sculpture” (Tosatto 1990)⁶ and others have gone so far as to compare it to Malevich’s *Black Square*, as both works “cancelled previous art in one grand abrupt statement of conviction” (Fuchs 1986, 46–7). Fulton himself talks about it in this way:

⁴ A presentation is accessible on the website of the Galleri Riis, Oslo, <https://galleririis.com/exhibitions/60/>.

⁵ My translation. A summary review of the various tendencies in White (1992, 73).

⁶ Translation taken from Careri (2002, 104).



Fig. 2 Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967; a photography of a walking performance. Screen shot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlcFTNcH2y8>

Surely one of the most original works of twentieth-century western art. (“The longest journey begins with but a single step”). At the age of twenty-three, Long combined two seemingly unrelated activities: sculpture (the line) and walking (the action). A line (made by) walking. In time, the sculpture will have disappeared, long before the commercialization of the word “green”... and those footprints on the moon (Fulton 1991, 245).

Careri, for his part, comments:

The image of the treated grass contains the presence of absence: absence of action, absence of the body, absence of the object. But it is also unmistakably the result of the action of a body, and it is an object, a something that is situated between sculpture, a performance and an architecture of the landscape (Careri 2002, 144).

Although not mentioned directly (other works by Long appear anyway), this operation is to be inserted within the process documented by Lucy Lippard in her 1973 book *The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Lippard 1997). It is a process characterized by the loss of the key role played by the artwork along art history and, accordingly, of the link, traditionally seen as indissoluble, to *poiesis*, or, in other words, to the dimension of object-making.⁷ Starting from the 1960s, and more decisively in the years examined by Lippard, that is, from 1966 to 1972, the scenario of artistic research took position against the concept of work of art and its biunivocal relationship with a material object as its concretization; consequently, such an object ended up being substituted with gestures, performances, conceptual operations or with the artist's own body.

From this point of view, following Careri's insight, the body as experienced by the walking artists in their own practice can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, it can be considered as a mere "instrument of perception" (Careri 2002, 148), as in Fulton and Höpfner. By intentionally leaving no trace of their passing, they attest that walking is a way of knowing oneself or of reconfiguring such knowledge; furthermore, it is a way of conceiving, or, once again, reconfiguring, one's own relationship with the world and the surrounding space. As acutely observed by some critics, this is a "phenomenological experience" (Greenberg 2017, 567), in which the artists focus their attention on "that foot-eye agreement that constitutes the central mechanism of the action of walking and [on] the relationship that, through it, the body establishes with the territory" (Tedeschi 2016, 217).

On the other hand, the body can act as a "tool for drawing" (Careri, 2002, 148), such as in Long, who on the contrary leaves some traces of his passing, as the lines made by treading on grass show. These traces are obviously fleeting and ephemeral: there is no accident that, in this regard, the Irish writer Sara Baume (2017, 262), in a novel significantly entitled

⁷ See also, with reference to Fulton, Antich (2019, 188–9).

A Line Made by Walking, talks about “barely-there art.” This “drawing” or “designing” intent is somehow admitted by Long himself, who at least on one occasion, mentioning indirectly the line made in 1967, did not properly refer to drawing, but spoke of the “idea of making a sculpture by walking” (Long 2007a, 39). Höpfner is of the same opinion, stating that Long’s walking “gains the significance of a sculpture” (Höpfner, in Kravagna and Reder 2008). In subsequent interventions, this attitude becomes even more evident: as observed by Francesco Tedeschi (2016, 219), Long “does not limit himself to walking through a territory, but *generates it*, or at least generates a possible formal reinterpretation within it.”

Long’s attitude has been compared with Carl Andre’s works. In an interview, Andre stated that, for him, “the ideal sculpture is a road;” for this reason most of his works resemble a road, as they require the beholder “to follow them, to walk around them or go onto them” (Andre, in Tuchman 1970, 25–6). Hence the affinity with Long, which Long himself, however, has denied. He indicated the reciprocal “fundamental difference” in the fact that “Carl Andre makes objects on which to walk,” whereas his own art “consists in the act of walking itself” (Long, quoted in Gintz 1986, 7).⁸ Incidentally, an analogous difference is also to be found in Jean-Christophe Norman’s *Crossing New York* (2008), which Bertrand Westphal (2016, 159–62) considers similar to Long’s actions: in fact, it consisted not just in walking, but in a written line to be followed and read while walking (Norman 2008). For his part, Höpfner specifies the different experience—a perceptual, not a “sculptural” one—he intends to do when going on foot: “It’s clearly about achieving a different—heightened—state of perception: taking a trip, like taking drugs” (Höpfner, in Kravagna and Reder 2008). Likewise, Fulton generally pursues the attempt to clear his mind during the walk, according to the idea that “by emptying your mind as much as possible, you can then let ‘nature’ in and this also helps your walking performance” (Fulton, in Auping 1982, 89). From this point of view, he often tries to push his physical, perceptual, and mental limits, for example marching for days without talking or sleeping. Such an activity is not alien to Long, who is in turn engaged in continuous walks for 24 hours or marches over long distances: in these walks, however, he focuses his own experience not primarily on the psychic dimension, but on the awareness of being able to “go into a different physical zone” (Long, in Furlong 2002, 131).

⁸ Translation taken from Careri (2002, 122).

In any case, for Höpfner as well as for Fulton, walking in perfect solitude does not just imply practicing an activity that “exorcises melancholy” and allows them to acknowledge “the deep pleasure one encounters changing scenery, wandering like the Tartari Zalmohenses or whirling like dervishes”, as Fernando Castro Flórez (2015, 130–1), mindful of Bruce Chatwin, writes about Fulton.⁹ A “nomadic” aspect can well be found; nonetheless, it gives rise not so much to an exorcism of melancholy, but rather to the “feeling of a topological incompleteness of being”, as claimed by Paul Ardenne. It is a distress that depends on not feeling in the place where one should or would like to be, from which follows an “anxious nomadism, in search of a promised land” (Ardenne 2002, 135). Yet, as seen above, the artists highlight, first and foremost, the very challenge against themselves and the different way of relating to the spaces and places that such challenge brings with it. To return to the question of the “deep pleasure” raised by Castro Flórez, it is precisely to defy one’s own body and one’s whole being-in-the-world that offers “a kind of pleasure”, as Long (in Furlong 2002, 131) openly states.

Fulton’s *The Pilgrims Way*—on display at the Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon—is a good example of the challenge against their own limits experienced by the walking artists (Fig. 3).¹⁰ As the inscription under the photographic image says, it refers to a three-day and three-night walk without sleep:

A CONTINUOUS 125 MILE WALK WITHOUT SLEEP
ENGLAND SOLSTICE FULL MOON 21 22 23 DECEMBER 1991

Fulton chose a famous pilgrimage trackway, the “Pilgrims’ Way” from Winchester to Canterbury: places full of history that he had already covered in 1971.¹¹ Moreover, the days were certainly not chosen randomly, considering the symbolic significance of the coincidence between the winter solstice and the last full moon of the year, the so-called “full cold moon” (Enjalran 2015, 21). Despite all this, the uninterrupted march, day and night, reshaped that experience into a challenge. The “heightened state of perception” mentioned by Höpfner regards, of course, not only

⁹ My translation. The reference both to melancholy and to the Tatars (Tartari) is to the memory of Robert Burton evoked in Chatwin’s *The Songlines* (1998, 169). An “affinity of thought and cultural sphere” between Chatwin and the walking artists is claimed by Tedeschi (2016, 214). My translation.

¹⁰ See the Museu Coleção Berardo’s website, <https://pt.museuberardo.pt/colecao/obras/364>.

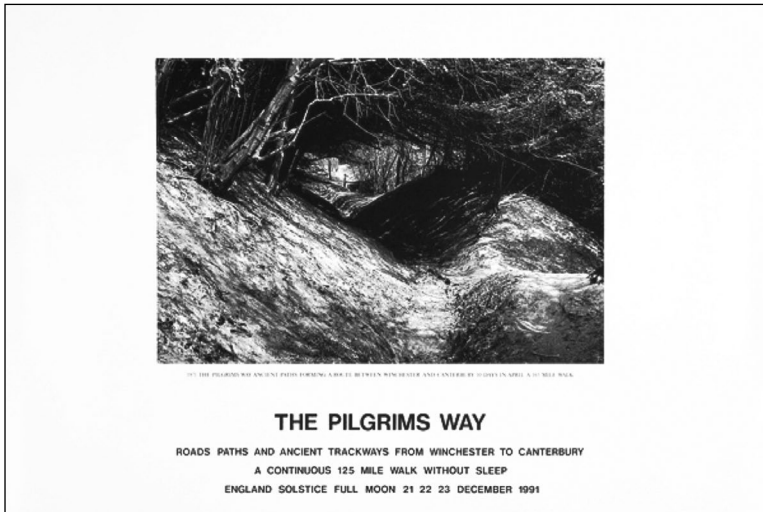


Fig. 3 Hamish Fulton, from the series *The Pilgrims way*, 1971; a photography of a walking experience, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon

the five senses, but, as we have seen in Long, the whole bodily relationship with oneself: experiencing stress, feeling pleasure or pain, perceiving the distance, being aware of the flow of time, and so on. During the excursion the artist “is the very body of the work, at the same time actor and spectator, creation and created thing, limit of himself and limit of the world”, as pointed out by Gilles A. Tiberghien (2012, 143).¹² Consequently, beyond their reciprocal differences, every walking artist would agree with Long’s following statements:

My work is about my senses, my instinct, my own scale and my own physical commitment (Long 2007a, 16).

All my work is carried out entirely with my body, it is composed of the time of my walking, of the measurement of my steps (Long, quoted in Coen 1994).¹³

¹¹ Fulton’s 1971 walk is documented, among other things, by a picture published in Lippard (1997, 260), and by another picture now owned by the Tate Gallery but not on display, which can be found on the Gallery’s website, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fulton-the-pilgrims-way-t07995>. See also Tedeschi (2016, 210–1).

¹² My translation.

¹³ My translation.

It is from a similar point of view—albeit within an attitude more devoted to mental projections than to the bodily self-experience (Graevenitz 1977; Tedeschi 2016, 244–5)—that Stanley Brouwn experimented different ways of measuring distances, using units based on his own body: the ‘Brouwn cubit’ (47 cm), the ‘Brouwn foot’ (26 cm), and so on (Broeker 1996, 405; Russeth 2017).

2. Just art or political art?

A peculiar trait of Fulton’s activity, compared to his colleagues, resides in his social and political engagement. It is true that he does not claim any kind of direct activism. In so doing, he is apparently close to Long (2007a, 109), who declares: “My work is just art, not ‘political’ art”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as Muriel Enjalran (2015, 21) pointed out, “[h]e is not seeking to impose messages in an authoritarian and moralistic manner, he bears witness to a state of the world that is in many ways extremely worrying”.¹⁵ Indeed, Fulton shows a deep environmentalist commitment, which overcomes the purely artistic meaning of his work: “My work can evidently be inserted in the history of art, but never in the past has there been an era in which my concerns had such significance as today ... The open spaces are disappearing” (Fulton, quoted in White 1992, 73–4).¹⁶ Hence his interest in the thought of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss:

Why did I want to meet Arne Næss? In fact, for many reasons (including his playfulness) but certainly I was attracted to his famous phrase “Simple in means, rich in ends”. Næss joined the word ecology [...] to philosophy, producing: Ecosophy. Arne Næss also gave the world: Deep ecology. “Shallow ecology, he believed, meant thinking the big ecological problems could be resolved within industrial capitalist society” (Fulton 2010, 47–9).¹⁷

¹⁴ In any case, the artist continues: “But I do believe—now more than years ago—hat I have to be responsible, both in my work and in my general life, like anyone” (ibid.).

¹⁵ The value of bearing witness seems to be minimized by Tedeschi (2016, 202), who writes that the walking artists “do not walk hundreds of kilometers to demonstrate ecological reasons or a sporting passion [...]; rather, they find in these operations aesthetic values, devoid, as such, of an immediate purpose”. My translation.

¹⁶ Translation taken from Careri (2002, 146).

¹⁷ Here Fulton quotes Næss’ statements cited in Schwarz (2009).

Thus, we also understand Fulton's explicit link between his intent to leave on the ground only the footprints of his own steps—or, in any case, to ensure that his walks have as little impact as possible—and the principles of *Leave no Trace* (Fulton 1998, 28; Fulton 2010, 41; Wilson 2002, 23). This is an ethical practice, or a practical ethics, that has developed a series of rules to support the protection of places during outdoor activities (camping, trekking, barbecues, picnics, and so on).¹⁸

Such a link shows another difference with land artists, who often consider nature as a reservoir of raw materials for their works. So, whereas these artists modify the places of their actions—remember Long's statement against bulldozers and big projects—in Fulton's view, on the contrary, "it is nature that transforms us. It has its own life cycle that must at all costs not be disturbed, especially not in the name of art", as Enjalran (2015, 17) points out. These beliefs reveal a profound spirituality, which is well expressed by the claim: "For me being in nature is a form of immediate religion" (Fulton, quoted in White 1992, 74; and in Ardenne 2002, 129).¹⁹ A spirituality, maybe, not far from Zen Buddhism (White 1992, 77–8). Moreover, Fulton's social and political engagement and his committed spiritual involvement are evident in his interest in the culture of Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians and in his firm stance in favor of Tibet's independence (Fulton, in Auping 1982, 87). On this point, he says: "I see two seemingly unresolvable problems in the world: the illegal occupation of Tibet since 1950 and the lack of action to reduce global warming" (Fulton, quoted in Enjalran 2015, 21). One more example of his engagement is *Slowalk*, an action that took place in 2011 at the Tate Modern in London, in support of the controversial Chinese artist and activist—or "artist" (Trione 2022)—Ai Weiwei, who was repeatedly censored by the Chinese government, and in the name of freedom of artistic expression.²⁰

In more general terms, we can add that practicing a free and slow activity such as walking implicitly means taking a stance—political in a broad sense—against our contemporary technocratic society, which is devoted to urgency, efficiency, to the rationalization of labor, and to maximum profit. The following reflections by the French anthropologist David Le

¹⁸ See the *Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics* website, <https://lnt.org/>.

¹⁹ Translation taken from Careri (2002, 146).

²⁰ A video is available on Tate Gallery's YouTube channel, <https://youtu.be/oCc8Rs4sOVY>.

Breton, which refer to walking in general, may well be applied to the walking artists:

The walker is a resistant being, a being of pleasure (opposite to the urban being), the being of conversation (and not of communication), the being of silence (and not of noise), the being of slowness (and not of hurry). Walking, in the context of contemporary reality, seems to express a form of nostalgia, or resistance (Le Breton 2008, 23).²¹

Hence, walking artists not only pose “a kinetic counterpoint to the principle of speed” and create the basis of “a kinetic and kinaesthetic counter-culture against the principle of acceleration,” as Ralph Fischer (2011, 59 and 61) writes about Long,²² but also “move within the interstices and the downtimes of productivism”, to quote Nicolas Bourriaud (2015, 10).²³

3. Experience or image?

As already said, in the next pages I shall dwell on the real aporia inherent in the activity of all walking artists, after all well known by themselves. It is a problem that can be summarized as follows, with Enjalran's words:

But by what means can an individual take a solitary experience that happened in nature at a given time in the past and share it with a viewer who did not experience it and cannot live it? [...] This tension between the incommunicability of experience and the deep desire to communicate it is what drives this “walking artist,” who believes art is only valid if it can be experienced and activated by the viewers (Enjalran 2015, 17).

There exists a gap between the artist's experience of walking and the viewers, who were absent during that experience and are present elsewhere, that is, in a gallery or in a museum. The visitors are spatially and temporally distant from the artist's walk. The exhibitions only display

21 My translation.

22 My translation.

23 My translation.

the photographs taken during the excursion, to which the artists can add captions indicating the places they have photographed, often little or not at all detectable or recognizable (Tiberghien 2012, 189; Long 2007a, 60–1). Moreover, they show autonomous texts, maps and drawings, sometimes set in an iconic fashion on wall paintings. In Long and Fulton's texts nothing is left to chance: in an intelligent and evocative graphic setting, influenced by advertising posters (Stevanin 2017, 240),²⁴ the texts are written in various colors and in different sizes and composed in order to make some words stand out, thus reinforcing the message they convey (Fig. 4). Tiberghien (2012, 283) considers Fulton's texts "apothegms," that is, personal sayings, but we could perhaps think of them as real artworks, considering that Long calls them "textworks". Such writings seem to operate as "experience markers' that can be communicated to others", as Enjalran (2015, 22) suggests, with a not fully convincing reference to John Dewey (1980, 37). They also aim "to allow the viewer to touch, somehow, the experience of the walk", as Andrew Wilson (2002, 20) writes. This is exactly what Long means:

A walk expresses space and freedom and the knowledge of it can live in the imagination of anyone, and that is another space too (Long 2007a, 18).

A photograph or text feeds the imagination by extension to other places (Long 2007a, 29).

These walks appear represented or described in my work in three distinct forms (maps, photographs or written texts), and on every occasion I resort to the most appropriate one for every idea. Every form feeds the imagination, they are the distillation of experience (Long 2007b).²⁵

However, precisely because, citing Dewey's passage Enjalran refers to, "without external embodiment, an experience remains incomplete" (Dewey 1980, 51, quoted in Enjalran 2015, 17), we are still only having to do with a diversion of the artist's experience, that is, with its "echo and shadow" (Antich 2019, 188), or with a "metonymic trace" (Stevanin 2017, 237).²⁶ As some critics have observed, here lies the real paradox that walking

²⁴ Stevanin properly refers to the photo pictures of Fulton's latest books and posters.

²⁵ My translation.



Fig. 4 Hamish Fulton, *Volcano*, 2008, wall work relating to a walk around Mýrdalsjökull glacier in southern Iceland (June 24th – July 7th, 2008 and February 28th – March 6th, 2013), i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

artists share with all the tendencies of Outdoors art. It is the contradiction for which, on the one hand, these artforms were born as tendencies that do not want to create objects, on the basis of the already mentioned “dematerialization” and, at the same time, intend to avoid the usual exhibition spaces, thus questioning the secular close relationship between art and museum (not to mention the market). On the other hand, these art approaches do not even want to reduce themselves to pictures, like wall paintings, photographs and drawings, as they consist in actions and direct experiences of the artists themselves. Nevertheless, the artists come back into the gallery spaces, producing images or signs that no longer have any connection with the experiences from which they were born or in which they originally consisted—except for the structure of reference in which their being images or “experience markers” consists. The result is photographs, videos, drawings or “textworks” destined to be exhibited and sold in the usual art world contexts: galleries, museums, catalogues, artist’s books—likely to become collector’s items (Stevanin 2017, 233–4)—and so forth (Dorfles 2004, 153–4; D’Angelo 2010, 76–82; Tiberghien 2012, 229).

26 My translation of both occurrences. Tedeschi (2016, 217), also speaks of “metonymic function” regarding the pictures used by Fulton to accompany his walks.

In this regard, D'Angelo warns that the question is not just about

pointing out that, for a sort of nemesis, an artform that wanted to leave the galleries, refuse the exhibition spaces and propose itself in contexts completely different from the traditional ones, then ends up withdrawing in an orderly fashion into the atelier and coming back into the commercial circuit (2010, 78).²⁷

This is also Brian O'Doherty's interpretation, who, in his well-known *Inside the White Cube*, synthetically comments:

Whatever its excesses, the American avant-garde never attacked the *idea* of a gallery, except briefly to promote the move to the land which was then photographed and brought back to the gallery to be sold (O'Doherty 1999, 93–4).

Actually, this way of understanding appears problematic. In fact, we should ask ourselves whether the intent to leave galleries and museums did not only regard the aim of reshaping art, but also the purpose of extending the exhibition spaces themselves, giving rise to an indoor-outdoor relationship: a relationship which is conceived by the outdoor artists themselves, or at least by some of them, as a dialectic one, therefore without gaps (Tiberghien 2012, 37–8; Ardenne 2002, 29–30).

The following excerpt from a dialogue between the land artists Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson is significant in this regard:

Oppenheim: I think that the outdoor/indoor relationship in my work is more subtle. I don't really carry a gallery disturbance concept around with me; I leave that behind in the gallery. Occasionally I consider the gallery site as though it were some kind of hunting-ground. [...]

Smithson: [...] I've designed works for the outdoors only. But what I want to emphasize is that if you want to concentrate exclusively on the exterior, that's fine, but you're probably always going to come back to the interior in some manner (Smithson 1996, 242–3).

27 My translation.

Thus said, we must draw the most relevant implications of the antithetical nature of these artforms with respect to images. Where “traditional” art is concerned, it is true that it is very often looked at by means of its pictorial reproductions: after all, another extension of the exhibition spaces (Krauss 1986, 141–2).²⁸ In any case, it is always possible, at least on the paper, a direct contact to the works in museums and galleries. In walking art such a contact is impossible: as this artform consists in walking, what lacks is precisely the work (D’Angelo 2010, 77–8). The “really singular datum” then, as D’Angelo sharply points out, consists in the fact that “an artform that can be conceived only as an *experience*, and not as an *image*, can be enjoyed only as an image, and not as an experience” (D’Angelo 2010, 78).²⁹

On this point, D’Angelo accuses the artists of wandering off, moreover with a good deal of false consciousness. Referring to Long’s open air sculptures (but the remark is also valid for the lines drawn by walking), D’Angelo writes that the English artist “knows very well that his sculptures are ‘seen’ first of all by the visitors of his exhibitions (Fig. 5), by the buyers of the books about him, that is, they are not ‘seen’ at all, if not through photographic mediation” (D’Angelo 2010, 79).³⁰ Yet Long himself, on the one hand, firmly denies all this:

It is false to think that my landscape sculptures are never seen. They are sometimes seen by the inhabitants of the region, sometimes while I am making them, or they are discovered by chance by people who may not recognize them as art, but who nevertheless see them (Long, quoted in D’Angelo 2010, 78).³¹

However, on the other hand, he seems to be content with the almost purely photographic (or map-based) visibility of the places he has travelled:

[I]t’s a very important aspect of my work that the locations of the sculptures, even though they’re obviously real (just as real as, say, the Tate Gallery), are also anonymous. It’s not part of the idea of

28 See also—or better still, first and foremost—Malraux (1978, 46), recalled by Krauss herself.

29 My translation.

30 My translation.

31 My translation.

the work for them to become famous sites, to be visited by lots of people. In fact, the whole point of a sculpture could be its isolation, or tranquillity or silence. So I'm happy to have this way of showing those works through photographs or maps. Anyone looking at a map work can find that place, so in that sense it's just as public as a room in the Tate Gallery, because that place exists out there in the world (Long, in Furlong 2002, 134).

Nevertheless, we can also think that such a paradox is not a way of wandering off, but rather the thematic core of research of several outdoor artists and, with them, of walking artists. Not, however, or at least not only, as D'Angelo (2010, 80) thinks, because they consider the photographic mediation already in planning their interventions, making a virtue out of necessity. A similar point of view is also affirmed by Rosalind Krauss (1986, 287), who maintains that "the work of Richard Long and Hamish Fulton has focused on the photographic experience of marking", and by Nancy Foote (1976, 50), who points out that in both artists "the act of photographing is as much a part of the work as the resulting image". According to this view, Fulton, who leaves no traces, is "substantially a landscape photographer" and photography is what allows him to "charge' the landscape esthetically", as D'Angelo (2010, 80) and Foote (1976, 50), respectively, think.³² Moreover, Elizabeth H. Norman maintains that Fulton's photos, which at least in a first phase were desolate and in black and white (a poetic attitude still pursued by Höpfner) "resemble photographs of 19th century explorations", capable as such of conveying "an explorer's sense of wonder and his desire to record remarkable and new sights" (Norman 1990, 27). Likewise, speaking of Long, one would wonder what would happen to his lines made by walking if there were no photographs or even videos, a medium which he has also experimented, albeit episodically (D'Angelo 2010, 81).³³

If we are to follow this interpretation, we must also agree that the risk inherent in such a procedure is the pictorial rendering of something we already known, which is fed by the stereotype of the "ecologically

32 My translation of D'Angelo's passage. See, however, the doubts expressed by Wilson (2002, 26).

33 Long himself states that he is not at all interested in video and TV programs. See Long (2007, 67).



Fig. 5 Richard Long, *Puebla Circle*, 2020; red and white slate from Puebla, Estado de México. Diameter: 9m, Height 0.1m, Approx. 500 slates

correct” through, as we have seen, an apparently modest and ordinary style. Such style, however, as D’Angelo adds, is in fact

well functional to a certain mysticism implicit in ecological and minimalist gestures: those who look at them see more than they perceive, because they see what they already know, that is, a gesture in the wilderness, a gesture of a lonely human being who marks nature only with the forces of her or his body (D’Angelo 2010, 81).³⁴

This only confirms, in his viewpoint, the communicative gap, or rather the “insuperable abyss” (D’Angelo 2010, 81)³⁵ existing between the living experience of the artists and the one—not so living, or no more living—of the beholders, who look at pictures and writings in the gallery, at the museum or at home.

If, however, we want to understand whether and to what extent the “experience versus pictures paradox” really represents the core of the research carried out by Long, Fulton and the other walking artists or

34 My translation.

35 My translation.

whether, on the contrary, their activity is dominated by an attitude of wandering off with false consciousness, we must go beyond these arguments and examine if such artists take an explicit stance on this purpose. This seems indeed to be found in several artists' statements. Long, for example, expresses himself in this way: "My art is the essence of my experience, not a representation of it"; "my work has never been remotely concerned with performance" (Long 2007, 26 and 67). This is echoed by some Fulton's textworks (or apothegms):

AN ARTWORK CANNOT RE-PRESENT THE EXPERIENCE OF A WALK—
THERE ARE NO WORDS IN NATURE
AN OBJECT CANNOT COMPETE WITH AN EXPERIENCE
WALKING IS THE CONSTANT—THE ART MEDIUM IS THE VARIABLE
WALKS ARE FACTS FOR THE WALKER AND FICTION FOR EVERYONE ELSE
AN ARTWORK MAY BE PURCHASED BUT A WALK CANNOT BE SOLD
(Fulton, in Giusti 2015a, 1:26–7).

According to Lorenzo Giusti's insight, Fulton's use of texts and photographs not only "illustrates the impossibility of capturing the experience in its sensory and mental dimension". Rather, when texts and pictures are superimposed to landscape and to the experience of walking, they end up evoking "the idea that every performance, and thus every experience, lives a life of its own. At most, it may produce some residue, which is the only part that can be given to the public" (Giusti 2015b, 1:9). As "residual"—the same term used by Long (in Furlong 2002, 131) to connote his photographs—, texts and pictures have "the job of conveying the idea of time, and a sense of the duration of the walk" (Giusti 2015b, 1:9). However, since they cannot re-present the experience of walking, but they just can limit themselves to a "metonymic trace", even their referential function of being "experience markers" not only appears, as we have already seen, problematic, but this problematic condition emerges in an explicit manner, to the point of assuming skeptical contours. This has implications that reverberate on the "insuperable abyss" evoked by D'Angelo, as well as on the fictional aspect that walking assumes for everyone else who are not the walker: "It is from the words themselves that the viewer must learn to understand the meaning of the words used to describe the walk" (Giusti 2015b, 1:9). On this point Fulton has been accused of "presumption" by Joseph Kosuth, due to the fact "that we

should care about this personal experience” (Kosuth, quoted by Fulton in Hapkemeyer 2005b, 24). Fulton replied to this accusation:

If a mountaineer writes a personal account of a solo climb, would this same opinion apply? Might it even ask: “Why climb at all?” (My own feeling is that I would like to encourage more creativity, not condemn the personal choices of other artists. And “I know what I like”) (Fulton, in Hapkemeyer 2005b, 24).

Although Fulton’s work has been noted for having a “storyteller quality” (Greenberg 2017, 568), the meaning of his art—and this can be extended to all walking artists—does not consist in telling the story of a personal experience, even though, in his view, this attitude is not to be stigmatized. However, if things were only like that, Fulton and his colleagues would remain completely stuck in the “insuperable abyss” between artists and viewers, without any thematization and, thus, without a critical stance towards this gap. This also makes it possible to clarify the difference between such an artform and sport endeavors, even in the event of extreme feats (ultramarathons and the like) which are more challenges against oneself and one’s limits than competitions against other athletes. In fact, some of these artists have sometimes confronted themselves with extreme sportsmen and sportswomen: a name for all, Fulton with the great mountaineer Reinhold Messner (2005). However, their activity is first and foremost research, which is based on a “twofold essence”, as Giusti (2015b, 1:9) points out. On the one hand, it is “an ode to wandering as a form of awareness of self and the world;” but, on the other hand and at the same time, it is also “a reflection on art, through an analysis of the complex relationship between experience and narration” (Giusti 2015b, 1:9). An artform, therefore, which, in making itself, is an inquiry into the conditions of possibility both of its making—that is, walking—and of doing art in general, as well as of its communication. The “insuperable abyss” thus reveals itself to be an element of the very core of walking artists’ research, as a thematization of the hiatus that D’Angelo himself recognizes to be always present “between what the work means for those who make it and what it can say to those who merely observe it” (D’Angelo 2010, 81).³⁶

36 My translation.

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