

The Methodological and Conceptual Practice of Walking in Contemporary Art Production

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Abstract

The act of walking, which appears as an ordinary bodily movement in everyday life, is transformed into a multilayered practice of production in contemporary art. Moving beyond its function as a means of displacement, this act acquires the character of witnessing, questioning borders, and reconfiguring the meaning of space. In this study, walking is examined as a conceptual method that renders the artist's bodily relationship with public space visible and transforms the viewer into one of the constitutive elements of the artwork. In this regard, walking-based art practices have been analyzed through document analysis method. The study revealed that walking cannot be reduced to a singular and fixed function within

contemporary art. As a critical practice, walking produces different layers of meaning through political intervention, memory, borders, and relations with urban space. In this context, the study demonstrates that walking reconstitutes the relationship between the body and the space in contemporary art production. Thus, it treats the artistic experience as an expanding practice in the context of participation and knowledge production.

Keywords: Walking, Contemporary Art, Social Memory, Performance Art.

JEL Codes: Z11, Z10, Z13

Citation: Çalış, E., & Kaplan Çalış, Y. (2026). The methodological and conceptual practice of walking in contemporary art production. *Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches (ROMAYA Journal)*, 2026(2).

1. Introduction

Walking is an apparently ordinary act that nevertheless carries profound meanings. Rather than being limited to movement from one place to another, it also constitutes a field of thought, observation, and temporal experience. From this perspective, walking is not a passive observation directed towards the external world but an act of active participation and trace-making. Modern thinkers have approached walking as more than a bodily activity, regarding it as a means of perceiving space, developing thought, turning inward, and engaging with social structures. Frédéric Gros argues that walking removes the individual from the pace of everyday life and brings them into direct contact with reality, while the body encounters the resistance of the earth with every step (Gros, 2023: 88). Artists have likewise placed walking at the centre of their practices, adopting it as a mode of inquiry, a language of expression, and a method of production with both everyday and political dimensions. For the artist, walking becomes a creative practice that situates the body within temporal flow, establishes an experiential connection with space, and makes visible the encounters that emerge throughout the process.

A shared characteristic of many approaches that incorporate walking into artistic practice is the openness and uncertainty inherent in the act. Walking prioritises process over outcome and places experience rather than a completed product at its centre. Walks that begin according to a plan may be shaped by unexpected encounters, change direction, or be interrupted. Walking therefore differs from the mere bodily execution of a predetermined idea. Artistic meaning develops throughout the process through the body's encounters with its surroundings, the rhythm of movement, changes in direction, and chance events.

The historical relationship between walking and art can be traced through the transformation of movement from a visually represented subject into a direct method of artistic production. In nineteenth-century art, the walking figure became an important indicator of changing urban life and everyday experience. With the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, however, walking ceased to be merely represented within the artwork and became an action in itself. While Dada excursions into ordinary areas of the city suspended the necessity of producing an art object, Surrealist walks foregrounded chance, aimless wandering, and unexpected relations with space. Within the Situationist International, Guy Debord's concept of the *dérive* transformed walking into a critical practice of movement based on experiencing the effects of the urban environment on emotions and behaviour (Arapoğlu, 2016: 5). Within Land Art, walking became part of artistic production through the relationship established between the

body and nature, the temporary traces left on the land, and the documentation of this experience through photographs, maps, and texts (Kedik, 2010). Over time, walking moved beyond the context of nature and began to be used as an aesthetic and political instrument in urban space. Walking through, observing, mapping, and redefining the city acquired the character of a critical practice that transformed the artist's relationship with public space.

The body is a determining element in walking-based artistic practices. Over time, the walking body inscribes itself into space and transforms the path into a trace. This trace may be directly visible or may be followed through photographs, videos, written texts, maps, sounds, or narratives. Although the walk itself is temporary, the transfer of the traces it produces into different media opens the relationship between permanence and transience to discussion. Space, moreover, is not a neutral surface across which the artist moves. By influencing the body's direction, rhythm, senses, and encounters, it becomes an active element within the production process.

The multilayered nature of walking has been addressed from different theoretical perspectives within psychogeography, mobility studies, performance theory, critical geography, and walking studies. Psychogeography considers walking a practice that interrupts habitual urban routes, defamiliarises familiar spaces, and opens environmental effects to experience. While Debord's concept of the *dérive* proposes moving beyond planned routes and questioning the everyday organisation of the city through bodily movement, Michel de Certeau regards walking as an everyday practice through which the body selects routes from among the possibilities offered by the urban plan and transforms space into a lived domain (Certeau, 1988: 96). The *flâneur*-centred approach, however, remains limited in its ability to explain the physical act of walking and the diversity of pedestrian experiences because it primarily interprets walking through the perspective of a mobile gaze (Forgione, 2005: 665).

Mobility studies and critical geography address this limitation by focusing on the social and material conditions of movement. Within the new mobilities paradigm developed by Sheller and Urry, movement is not regarded as a neutral form of displacement that merely enables travel from one point to another. Rather, it takes place through relationships among people, objects, technologies, and infrastructures. Borders, transport systems, and technical infrastructures make movement possible while simultaneously regulating who can move, where they can move, and how they can do so, thereby producing unequal forms of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Critical geography, in turn, makes visible the relationship of these arrangements to power, inequality, surveillance, and access. Nevertheless, research in

mobility studies and critical geography has largely concentrated on everyday transport, urban sociology, and ethnographic fieldwork, while addressing the conceptual and performative operation of walking in contemporary art only to a limited extent.

Performance theory foregrounds the transformation of the walking body from a vehicle that carries the artwork into an active participant in the production of meaning. The duration, rhythm, repetition, pauses, and environmental encounters of walking become decisive in shaping the work. While this approach explains the embodied and processual character of walking, it does not always examine the role of technical infrastructures, political boundaries, or systems of documentation in artistic production to the same extent. Walking studies, by contrast, treats walking not only as an object of research but also as an embodied and sensory means through which research is conducted. The transmaterial approach to walking methodologies understands walking as a research-creation process that develops through relations among human bodies, objects, sounds, technologies, geographical spaces, and networks of power. Within this framework, walking ceases to be a tool for confirming previously established knowledge and becomes a methodology through which new relations and concepts emerge in motion (Springgay & Truman, 2017).

Art history foregrounds the transformation of walking from representation into action, psychogeography emphasises urban drift, mobility studies examines the ways movement is organised, critical geography focuses on boundaries and relations of power, performance theory highlights the role of the body within process, and walking studies considers walking as a research method. Nevertheless, the ways in which walking carries memory into public space, renders political boundaries visible, directs the participant's perception, and makes digital infrastructures legible have not been sufficiently compared within a shared analytical framework. Addressing this gap, the present study considers walking as a methodological device that establishes relationships with memory, political space, participatory experience, and technical infrastructure across different artistic practices. These relationships enable walking to acquire a distinct function and produce different forms of knowledge in each case. The study therefore examines how walking becomes a method in different artistic practices and how it transforms the meaning of the artwork.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative and comparative research design to examine the different methodological and conceptual functions that walking has

acquired in contemporary art. Its primary aim is to reveal how walking produces meaning through its relationships with the body, space, memory, political boundaries, participation, and technical infrastructure. Rather than being treated as a single and fixed artistic category, walking is considered a method whose function varies according to the conceptual concerns, spatial context, and participatory structure of each artwork.

The sample was constructed through criterion-based purposive sampling. Within this framework, the artistic practices of Regina José Galindo, Francis Alÿs, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, and Ingrid Burrington were examined. A set of shared criteria guided the selection of the artists and artworks. One of the primary criteria was that walking should not merely appear as a represented subject but should function as a fundamental structural element through which the work is produced or experienced. The selection process also considered whether the works took place in public or urban space, intervened in such spaces, or rendered them visible in different ways. In addition, attention was paid to the use of walking for distinct yet comparable purposes, including embodied testimony, political and spatial intervention, guided participation, and the investigation of technical infrastructures. The availability of sufficient written, visual, auditory, and digital documentation was also included among the sampling criteria to enable a detailed examination of the works. Accordingly, the selected cases are not claimed to represent all walking-based artistic practices. Instead, they are regarded as analytically productive examples through which the different functions of walking in varying contexts can be made visible.

Document analysis was used as the primary method of data collection. The research data were obtained from academic publications on the selected artists and artworks, exhibition catalogues, artists' statements, institutional and online archives, photographs, maps, video recordings, websites, audio-walk materials, and participant guides. Since some of the works examined are temporary, site-specific, performative, or experienced through digital media, these documents were not treated solely as secondary records. Materials such as photographs, maps, videos, audio recordings, and guides were also included in the analysis as elements that preserve, transmit, and facilitate the re-experiencing of the works after their original presentation.

The collected data were evaluated through descriptive analysis, comparative visual analysis, conceptual analysis, and interpretive analysis. In the first stage, descriptive analysis was used to identify the historical, political, and artistic context in which each work was produced. Comparative visual analysis focused on the relationships established by the walking body

with routes, spaces, traces, maps, photographs, sounds, technical objects, and forms of documentation. This stage examined how these elements organised movement, directed the participant's attention, and determined what became visible or perceptible during the walk.

Conceptual analysis focused on the function assigned to walking in each artwork. Accordingly, the analysis examined how walking operated as a form of embodied testimony, a spatial intervention that questioned political boundaries, a structure that organised the participant's experience, or a method for investigating invisible technical infrastructures. Interpretive analysis was employed to understand how these arrangements shaped the position of the viewer or participant and what forms of spatial, political, sensory, or technical knowledge they produced.

The themes used in the study were developed through a combined deductive and inductive process. Body, space, memory, boundary, participation, guidance, and infrastructure were initially identified as analytical categories on the basis of the research question and the theoretical literature. These categories were subsequently reassessed through repeated readings of the documents related to the artworks and close examination of the visual materials. Relationships involving trace, route, visibility, mediation, materiality, and embodied experience that emerged during the analysis were also incorporated into the analytical framework.

The works were compared according to a set of shared analytical criteria, including the function of walking, the position of the body, the organisation of space and route, the structure of participation, the forms of guidance and mediation employed, the political or conceptual issue addressed by the work, and the type of experience or knowledge produced. This comparative approach prevented the artists from being presented merely as a sequence of individual cases and enabled the similarities and differences among the selected practices to be evaluated within a thematic framework. The study does not claim that the four cases represent the entirety of walking-based art. Rather, it aims to demonstrate comparatively how walking is reconfigured under different artistic, political, spatial, and technological conditions.

3. The Meaning-Making of Walking

The meanings that walking acquires as a form of artistic expression are particularly centred on the relationship between the individual body and public space. Through walking, artists establish a field of action that extends beyond bodily movement. While rendering memory and testimony visible, this field also stages forms of resistance. Walking may therefore function either as a silent act of protest or as a strategy for revealing the erased layers of collective memory. In walking-based art, meaning does not derive solely from an idea predetermined by the artist. The orientation of the body, the rhythm of movement, the route followed, and the spatial conditions encountered collectively contribute to the formation of the work. Walking can therefore be understood not as the representation of a fixed idea but as a relational process in which meaning emerges through bodily movement and the relationship established with the surrounding environment (Triggs et al., 2014).

This section examines this process through two inter-related practices that nevertheless assign different functions to walking: walking as an act of witnessing memory and walking as a means of rendering political boundaries visible. The first of these functions becomes evident in the practice of Regina José Galindo, in which walking transforms the body into a bearer of historical memory. By placing her body at the centre of the walk, Galindo renders it not merely a vehicle but also a witness, a reminder, and a subject of resistance. Her 2003 performance *Who Can Erase the Traces?* (Figure 1) is a powerful artwork that addresses the representation of memory in public space, the political potential of walking, and the use of the body as a means of resistance.

Galindo constructs a controlled performative structure through a predetermined route and the repeated act of bringing her feet into contact with blood. Beginning at the Constitutional Court (Corte de Constitucionalidad), she walks towards the National Palace of Guatemala (Palacio Nacional de Guatemala). Before setting out, she immerses her feet in a basin filled with human blood and leaves wet, bloodstained footprints on the ground, thereby forming a blood-marked line of connection between these two state institutions (Eccles, 2023: 9).

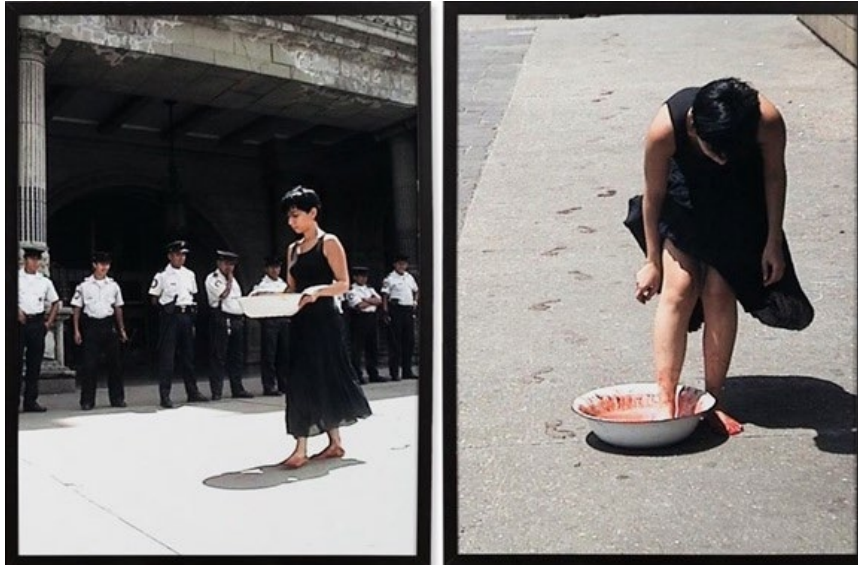


Figure 1. Regina José Galindo, 2003. Who Can Erase the Traces? /Quién puede borrar las huellas? performance, Guatemala
Source: https://www.artnet.fr/artistes/regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo/quien-puede-borrar-las-huellas-2-h559fAb3Bdi6y1a1_2OCQA2

Galindo's performance, in which she walks barefoot through the streets of Guatemala City after immersing her feet in a basin filled with human blood and leaving bloodstained footprints behind her, constitutes both a political response and a silent outcry. The performance emerged as a protest against the approval of former Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt's renewed presidential candidacy and functions as an act of remembrance directed against attempts to erase the traces of state violence. Galindo describes the emotional rupture and internal impulse behind the action as follows:

It emerged from rage and fear. When it was announced that Efraín Ríos Montt had managed to win acceptance as a presidential candidate, I was in my room, and I suffered an attack of panic and depression. I cried out, I kicked and stomped my feet, I cursed the system that rules us. How was it possible that a character as dark as this would have such power with which to bend everything to his will? I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it. I had to do it (Galindo & Goldman, 2006: 40).

Here, walking moves beyond an ordinary action and becomes a form of silent rebellion. Galindo does not speak, chant slogans, or offer any explanation during the walk. She simply walks (Figure 2). Yet every step she takes and every bloodstained footprint she

leaves behind reminds the viewer of lives that have been lost. Walking thus becomes political both as an action in itself and through the traces it produces. In *Who Can Erase the Traces?* each step becomes a mark of memory, a political objection, and a means of rendering visible a past that has been subjected to erasure. Galindo's walk consequently creates a space of both individual and collective memory. It reveals how art can develop into a form of resistance in the face of social injustice.

The transmaterial approach to walking methodologies does not regard the body as a closed subject that exists independently of its environment and produces meaning on its own. Instead, it argues that the body is constituted through its relationships with geographical spaces, material elements, and broader networks of power (Springgay & Truman, 2017: 28). From this perspective, the bare feet, human blood, street surface, chosen route, and state institutions in Galindo's performance are not merely symbolic elements. Through their combined operation, they transform historical violence into an embodied and spatial encounter. The bloodstained footprints do more than represent past losses. By becoming physically inscribed upon the everyday surfaces of institutional space, they re-establish the presence of suppressed history within the public sphere.



Figure 2. Regina José Galindo, 2003. Who Can Erase the Traces? / Quién puede borrar las huellas? performance, Guatemala
Source: <https://teaching.ellenmuller.com/walking/2021/05/23/regina-jose-galindo-who-can-erase-the-traces-2003/>

The performance brings the collective trauma produced by Guatemala's prolonged civil war and period of military dictatorship into public space through a route connecting two state institutions. In this way, an individual response becomes an embodied line of counter-memory directed against collective forgetting. In Galindo's own words, the action is not merely an individual reaction but also a struggle against social amnesia:

I say that these efforts were necessary because Guatemala is a country without memory. People with very limited access to education can easily be deceived by the promises and small gifts offered by politicians during election campaigns. The official party to which Ríos Montt belonged, and with which he remained affiliated, made a considerable effort and possessed all the necessary power to reach minority communities in Guatemala. These communities found it difficult to associate Ríos Montt, the presidential candidate, with the former dictator responsible for the most serious crimes against their own people. For this reason, every effort and every form of assistance was necessary (Galindo & Goldman, 2006: 40).

At this point, an important issue requires attention from the position of the viewer or reader. Galindo does not present a conventional process of recollection intended to restore a historical narrative. Instead, she initiates a series of interventions that disrupt the flow of information at the symbolic level of representation. In doing so, she opens a rupture within the classificatory logic of the existing order. This process functions as an act of critical reconsideration that questions the dynamics of a systematic programme of forgetting. It is achieved through the artist's direct engagement with violence and with the attempts to erase that violence from collective memory (Eccles, 2023).

The artist's description of Guatemala as "a country without memory" points to a social structure in which historical traumas are suppressed through institutional and political mechanisms. Limited access to education creates conditions in which voters can be more easily manipulated, allowing figures responsible for serious human rights violations in the past to re-enter the political sphere. In Galindo's practice, the body is neither merely a surface of representation nor a passive bearer of the past. By moving through public space, it becomes an active agent that intervenes in the continuing effects of historical violence. The tension between the vulnerability of bare feet and the determination of each step transforms bodily defencelessness into political action. Walking therefore functions not as a performance that narrates memory but as a method of bearing embodied witness to it. Within this framework, Galindo's practice may be described as walking that produces testimony.

The political significance that walking acquires in contemporary art is not limited to the body's transmission of traumatic memory. Some artists use walking as a means of rendering historically constructed boundaries, invisible political lines in public space, and geographical divisions visible once again. In this context, Francis Alÿs's walking-based performances may be understood as interventions that redefine the relationship between the body and space and produce meaning through that relationship. While Galindo's walk carries the traces of suppressed memory and state violence into public space, Alÿs transforms a historically drawn boundary into an embodied route and a visual mark. In both practices, walking becomes an action that transforms public space, renders political meaning visible, and leaves a trace.

Although the two works share an emphasis on trace-making, the material character and function of these traces differ. Galindo's bloodstained footprints are directly connected to the body and bear witness to lives that have been lost. Alj's line, by contrast, temporarily recreates the abstract presence of a historical boundary on the surface of the city. In the first example, the trace functions as an embodied record that carries past violence into the present. In the second, it operates as a cartographic intervention that questions how political geography is constructed.

Alj's artistic encounter with Jerusalem took place on 4 and 5 June 2004, and the performance was titled *The Green Line: Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political, and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic* (Figure 3). Also described as a walk through Jerusalem, the performance involved Alj walking through what he regarded as an archetypal city of conflict while carrying a perforated can of green paint, thereby creating a line that marked the route he followed. His route traced the section of the armistice boundary in Jerusalem that separated Israeli and Palestinian communities following the end of the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. Internationally recognised under United Nations supervision in 1949, the line became known as the 1949 Armistice Line. It nevertheless remains a contested boundary, having lost its official border status in 1967 (Gieskes, 2014: 33).

The first point to emphasise regarding the artist's practice is that, for Alj, walking constitutes a technique of production. It is a conceptual practice that generates meaning through bodily contact with urban space. This practice is shaped through actions such as collecting, changing direction, establishing passages, and rendering boundaries visible (Medina, 1997: 39). Walking-based urban research demonstrates that the moving body can establish

close contact with space and reveal relationships obscured by aerial perspectives and abstract data. Conducting research on foot situates the researcher within the social and spatial dynamics of the city. This embodied positioning also changes the nature of the knowledge produced (Kohler, 2014: 151).

This point is particularly important because Alj's walking practice should not be interpreted as the bodily execution of a previously established idea. Walking begins, instead, as a sensory encounter. The body is exposed to pavements, objects, rhythms, slopes, crowds, and chance events. Conceptualisation follows this encounter. The body does not merely traverse space but becomes a performative instrument through which critical meaning is inscribed into it. Alj's walks should therefore be understood as open-ended processes in which meaning emerges from embodied encounters rather than as performances that stage a predetermined meaning. In this performance, walking becomes both an extremely simple and an intensely political act. Alj merely walks. Yet the trail of green paint he leaves behind reproduces the visibility of a boundary burdened by historical conflict. The action therefore assumes the character of a poetic intervention rather than a spectacular protest. One of the work's continuing points of significance lies in the distinction it establishes between a wall and a line. Alj's line is a temporary, horizontal, and permeable trace. Security walls, by contrast, are permanent, vertical, and authoritarian structures. This opposition extends the performance beyond the specific context of the 1949 Armistice Line and makes it relevant as a broader critique of spatial control. The strength of the work lies not only in its reference to a particular geopolitical event but also in its capacity to render the material and symbolic violence of borders visible through a minimal gesture.



Figure 3. Francis Alj, *The Green Line*, Jerusalem, Israel, 2004

Source: <https://www.davidzwirner.com/artworks/francis-alj-the-green-line-cbd27>

It is necessary to consider how a political boundary, defined as an abstract line on a map, produces material, social, and lived consequences within actual urban space. A map reduces the boundary to a straight, measurable, manageable line viewed from above. Lived space, by contrast, encompasses neighbourhoods, roads, vacant areas, crossing points, everyday routines, and bodily movements. Alj's walk makes visible the distance between these two spatial registers. The distinction between observing the city by walking at ground level and understanding it from above through abstraction is also regarded as an important methodological divide in urban research. Walking renders visible the everyday practices, sensory encounters, and spatial differences that maps and totalising models of the city tend to leave in the background. Alj's performance transfers this distinction into a political context. A boundary that appears singular and uninterrupted on a map is divided, in the experience of the walking body into changing surfaces, checkpoints, neighbourhoods, and restrictions on movement.

From this perspective, the line drawn by Moshe Dayan on a map with a green pencil (Gieskes, 2014: 33) represents the abstract, reductive, and authoritative character of political decision-making. The line appears clear on the map, yet it does not exist with the same clarity in the actual city. Within the urban fabric

of Jerusalem, the boundary becomes discontinuous and ambiguous while continuing to exert material effects. Alj's reveals the complex and conflict-ridden ways in which the spatial order produced by political authority through cartography is manifested in everyday life. The map thus ceases to function merely as a representational device and becomes a technique of power that organises, divides, and controls space. Walking has been described as a practice capable of bringing embodied experience and critical reflection together, thereby revealing previously unnoticed connections and ruptures within the city (Pauknerová & Gibas, 2014: 187). The route followed by Alj's similarly exposes the rupture between the cartographic representation of the boundary and its lived consequences within urban space.

Rather than producing a permanent monument, the walk generates a temporary yet intense form of awareness. Alj's also states that The Green Line was not limited to retracing a symbolic boundary but constituted an experience that tested the body's physical and emotional endurance within political space. He explains that, in order to cross the municipal boundary of Jerusalem, he had to maintain the pace of the walk over two days and develop various tactics for passing through checkpoints (Alj's & Faesler, 2011: 70).



Figure 4. Francis Alj's, *The Green Line*, Jerusalem, Israel, 2004

Source: <https://www.avilafilm.be/en/film/green-line>

At this point, the acts of "walking along the line" and "drawing the line" should be considered together. The line functions as an instrument that defines both the boundary itself and the territories located on either side of it. It operates as a mechanism that separates "home" from the "foreign." At the same time, through the laws that legitimise and regulate it, the line becomes a practical means of determining who is or is not regarded as "equal," who is granted rights, and from whom those rights are withheld (Fisher, 2011: 16).

The paint poured by the artist (Figure 4) does not produce a permanent or fixed boundary on the ground. Through its contact with the surface, it leaves a temporary trace that gradually fades, disperses, and disappears. This transience, however, strengthens rather than weakens the conceptual impact of the performance. The erasable trace left by the artist suggests that the boundaries underlying Israel's practices of occupation, segregation, restriction, and spatial control over Palestine are neither natural nor immutable. Boundaries can be reproduced and

transformed under changing historical and political conditions. In this context, *The Green Line* may be interpreted as a work that renders the operation of this border regime visible through a temporary intervention and opens it to renewed consideration within the contemporary political context. In this respect, the work demonstrates how walking functions as a practice of trace-making in artistic production.

When the works of Galindo and Alj's are considered together, the political meaning of walking cannot be reduced to a single function. Galindo's bloodstained traces produce an embodied form of testimony that carries suppressed historical violence into public space. Alj's's green line, by contrast, constitutes a temporary spatial intervention that reveals the boundary as neither natural nor unchangeable. In both works, the walking body activates political space, although it does so through different means. In Galindo's practice, walking becomes a form of counter-memory that carries the past into the present. In Alj's's work, it becomes a method for questioning abstract geographical order within lived space. This comparison demonstrates that walking acquires different functions according to context and contributes in distinct ways to the conceptual construction of the artwork.

4. Walking Practices as a Participant

In contemporary art, walking should not be understood solely as an action performed by the artist in space. In some works, it becomes an experiential structure constructed through the participant's bodily orientation, perception, and movement. Participatory walking refers to a performative arrangement shaped less by the artist's own action than by the participant's embodied experience. Within this framework, the viewer moves away from the position of an observer standing before the work and becomes one of its constitutive elements through movement, perception, and engagement with space. Walking thus ceases to be merely an act of following a route and acquires meaning as an experiential construction that places the body in circulation among sound, memory, time, and space. Studies of walking art de-

monstrate that perception is not exclusively a mental or visual process but is shaped through bodily movement, posture, and interaction with the environment. Participation therefore involves more than simply observing the artwork. It entails establishing perceptual and spatial relationships through the body in motion (Triggs et al., 2014: 23). This section examines participatory walking through two distinct practices: an experience in which perception is guided by sounds and images, and a research practice based on reading urban infrastructure. In this context, the audio walks of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller¹ provide significant examples of this participatory structure.

Cardiff and Miller have been developing audio and video walks since 1991. These walks are recorded using binaural audio technology to produce a three-dimensional reproduction of sound. This recording system employs two small microphones positioned in the ears of a dummy head, allowing sound to be captured in a manner that approximates ordinary human hearing (Nedelkopoulou, 2011: 117). Through prerecorded sounds, narrative, and systems of guidance, Cardiff and Miller transform walking into a performative apparatus that shapes the participant's experience. The routes they construct therefore do not reduce walking to an act of displacement. Instead, the participant enters an experience that circulates among sound, memory, and space.

The transmaterial approach to walking methodologies emphasises that, in audio walks, the body does not move independently of its environment. Sound, technological devices, spatial surfaces, and bodily orientation operate together in the formation of experience. Within this framework, sound is not merely a medium for transmitting a prerecorded narrative. It functions as an active element that organises the participant's movement, directs attention, and shapes the relationship established with the surrounding environment (Springgay & Truman, 2017). In the works of Cardiff and Miller, headphones, recorded sound, walking routes, photographs, and the physical environment are interconnected within a single experiential structure.

¹Throughout this article, the collaborative works of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller are referred to as "Cardiff and Miller" following the first full mention of their names, for the sake of concision and consistency.

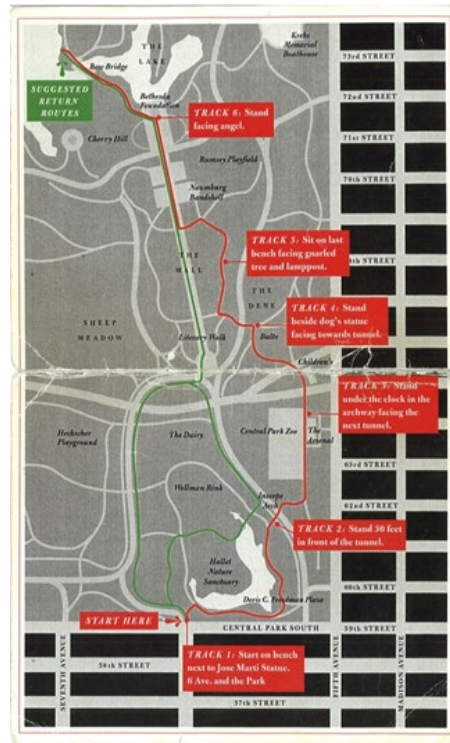


Figure 5. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, 2004, *Her Long Black Hair Map*

Source: https://www.publicartfund.org/exhibitions/view/her-long-black-hair/#section_1&gid=1&pid=1

One of the clearest examples of this approach is *Her Long Black Hair*. Presented in a semi-narrative mode, the work constitutes a complex sensory inquiry into sound, space, and time. Stream-of-consciousness observations are interwoven with fiction, local history, opera music, and other atmospheric and cultural elements. The walk makes use of photographs in order to reflect on the relationship between images and the concepts of possession, loss, history, and beauty. In the audio recording, Cardiff's voice guides listeners through the park and occasionally instructs them to take out and examine one of the photographs. These images connect the speaker and the listener within the shared physical environment of Central Park (Cardiff & Miller, n.d.).

The map used in *Her Long Black Hair* (Figure 5) demonstrates that the walk is a performative route structured through predesigned directions. The red route marking specific points in Central Park indicates the main path to be followed by the participant as well as the listening stops. Instructions marked by "track" numbers, such as stopping, sitting, or looking in a particular direction, transform the walk into an experiential score in which bodily movement and auditory commands are combined. The green return route shown on the map does not entirely control the participant's orientation within the park; rather, it points to a spatial construction that guides movement within a certain order. As the participant physically follows the route, they enter into the precomposed score of the work. Yet because of the incidental sounds, people, and changing conditions encountered in the environment, no two

walks unfold in exactly the same way. Thus, although the structure of the work is predetermined, the experience is reconstituted through the participant's movement.

Each participant is provided with a CD player and a set of photographs. Cardiff's voice on the audio track guides participants through the park and frequently asks them to take out the photographs and look at older images of the same surroundings (Figure 6). These photographs establish a visual comparison between the present landscape and past images associated with the mysterious black-haired woman. The audiovisual materials of the performance connect the narrator and the participant within the shared physical environment of Central Park. In this way, the experience moves back and forth between the present, the recent past represented by the time of the recordings, and a more distant past shaped by Cardiff's narration and its references to the historical landmarks of Central Park (Nedelkopoulou, 2011: 117).

At this point, Cardiff's use of binaural sound becomes particularly significant. In this arrangement, sound ceases to function merely as a vehicle of information and instead operates as a spatial construction that transforms the participant's sense of hearing the environment and being present within it. The sensation that sound is moving immediately beside the ear, behind the listener, or a few steps ahead causes the body to continually readjust its orientation and attention. In this way, the walk becomes a practice of bodily attunement, positioned in accordance with the call of sound.



Figure 6. Janet Cardiff, 2004, *Her Long Black Hair*

Source: <https://cardiffmiller.com/walks/her-long-black-hair/>

Sensory inquiry in walking research enables the environment to be understood not only through visual recognition but also through sound, rhythm, movement, and bodily orientation (Altop & Güler, 2024). In Cardiff's work, the participant does not perceive the environment as an unmediated reality. Instead, they continually compare the recorded sound with what they hear at that moment, the image held in their hand with the landscape before them, and the narrated past with the present they inhabit. The conceptual logic of Cardiff's practice becomes evident at precisely this point. Space is not a fixed or neutral ground in itself. It is an experiential field reorganised through sound, photography, memory, and narrative and activated bodily by the participant. In *Her Long Black Hair*, Central Park is constructed as a multilayered surface upon which the present and the past, the physical environment and recorded sound, and the existing landscape and the historical photograph held by the participant overlap. The photographs given to the participant connect the present-day landscape with images from the past while simultaneously evoking feelings associated with visual possession, loss, and memory. Walking thereby becomes a sensory passage between different temporal layers.

The participant appears to move freely along the route, yet enters the work by following the sound, directions, visual cues, and designated stopping points. This structure requires the concept of participation in Cardiff's practice to be reconsidered. Participation here means completing the work through bodily experience. The work comes into being only when the participant walks, stops, looks, and listens. Participation, however, does not imply unlimited freedom of movement or interpretation. The recorded narrative largely determines when the participant should stop, where they should look, and which ima-

ge they should examine. Nevertheless, the sounds of the live environment, the participant's memories, and the unexpected encounters that occur along the route transform this arrangement into a personal experience. The participant is therefore neither a passive viewer who merely follows instructions nor an autonomous subject who shapes the work with complete freedom. Rather, they occupy the position of a co-producer who completes a predetermined structure through embodied experience.

This approach, which transforms the participant's body into a constitutive element that engages with and produces meaning in space, continues in the practices of other artists through different tools and methods. Ingrid Burrington is an artist and writer whose work investigates internet infrastructure, digital networks, and their manifestations in urban space. Burrington approaches walking as a participatory form of inquiry based on reading the traces of digital infrastructure dispersed across the urban surface. Her work *Networks of New York: An Illustrated Field Guide to Urban Internet Infrastructure* functions as an art object that encourages participants to walk through the city, observe their surroundings, and follow infrastructural signs. Like Cardiff's map, the work is designed as a portable guide that participants carry and consult while moving through space (Figure 7). Here, however, guidance is provided not through an audio recording or a prerecorded narrative but through manhole covers, excavation markings, antennas, cable traces, and other indicators of infrastructure found in the street. In Burrington's work, participatory walking therefore shifts from sensory immersion towards infrastructural reading. Through walking, the participant ceases to be a passive recipient of the work and becomes an active subject who renders the material layers of urban networks visible.

In both Cardiff's and Burrington's works, the device carried by the participant constitutes a shared element that determines how the walk unfolds. In Cardiff's work, the map, photographs, and audio recording place the participant within a particular narrative, whereas Burrington's field guide directs attention towards identifying technical signs in the

surrounding environment. In the first example, participation is structured through a sensory and temporal experience. In the second, it is organised through observation, comparison, and research. This distinction demonstrates that participatory walking cannot be reduced to a single mode of experience.

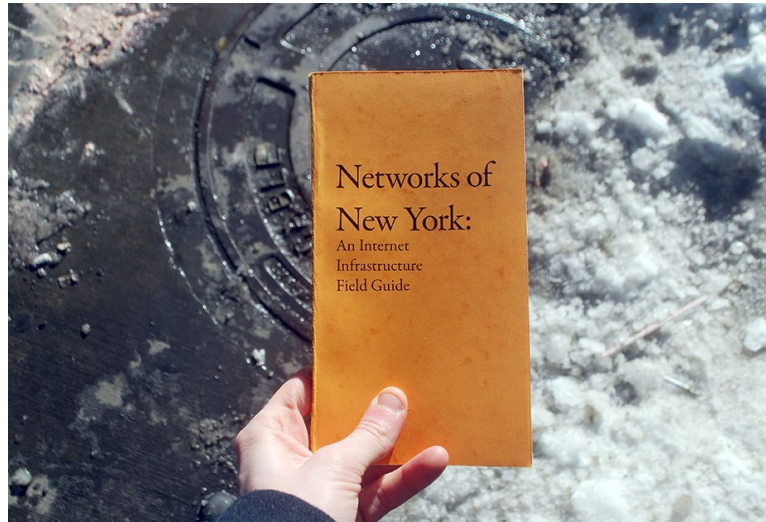


Figure 7. Ingrid Burrington, 2016, *Networks of New York: An Illustrated Field Guide to Urban Internet Infrastructure*
Source: <https://pioneerworks.org/residency/ingrid-burrington>

Burrington's approach is based on moving beyond an understanding of the digital network as an abstract system and examining it through identifiable objects and legible traces of infrastructure. During the walk, participants begin to understand the internet by noticing technical indicators embedded in the urban surface (Shipwright, 2016). As Burrington emphasises, the issue is not "technical expertise or access to secret rooms" but "learning what to look for and how to look" (Burrington, 2016: 14). Walking-based urban research enables a degree of close engagement with the city that other forms of movement cannot provide. The researcher's physical presence and movement within space directly affect what can be observed and how knowledge is produced. Walking is therefore not merely a means of reaching the research site but a methodological component of urban knowledge production (Shortell & Brown, 2014). In Burrington's work, the participant ceases to be a viewer who encounters ready-made information outside the field and instead becomes a researcher who produces knowledge through direct encounters with relevant technical objects.

Burrington's guide does not direct the participant towards a single point in the city or prescribe a fixed route. Instead, it encourages movement through a multilayered urban environment in which the traces of internet infrastructure are dispersed. This network walk begins with signs associated with the underground. Manhole covers, underground tunnels, fibre-optic cables, excavation markings, and

handholes direct the participant's attention towards the invisible infrastructure beneath the city's surface, where the material networks of the internet are often concealed. The guide then leads the participant towards street-level junction boxes, open telecommunications manholes, traffic systems, public Wi-Fi access points, and wireless networks within the subway system. Rather than functioning as an ordinary route plan that takes the participant from one location to another in New York, Burrington's guide transforms the city into a participatory network walk that traverses underground, street-level, and rooftop layers while teaching the participant how to read the material traces of digital networks.

The participant proceeds by establishing relationships between the pages of the guide and the infrastructural elements encountered in the surrounding environment. Walking consequently ceases to be merely an act of displacement and becomes a learning practice involving observation, comparison, and recognition. In this sense, the guide also moves beyond the status of a static book. It becomes a portable instrument of reading and orientation that accompanies the walking body.

From a transmaterial perspective, manhole covers, cables, antennas, markings, and network systems can be understood not as passive objects remaining in the background of human action but as material elements that participate in the production of meaning and knowledge through their relationship with the walking body. By directing the participant's at-

tention and movement, these elements allow digital infrastructure to be understood not as an abstract network but as a material system embedded within urban space (Springgay & Truman, 2017: 28). The gu-

ide therefore does more than identify which objects should be observed. It produces a form of critical visual literacy that teaches the participant to read the urban surface through a different mode of attention.



Figure 8. Ingrid Burrington, *Networks of New York* inner page view (Subway Wireless Networks)

Source: <https://weburbanist.com/2015/02/12/networks-of-new-york-field-guide-to-internet-infrastructure/>

The image showing the *Subway Wireless Networks* page opened on a subway platform (Figure 8) further clarifies this pedagogical structure. The participant encounters information about internet infrastructure within the very space in which that infrastructure operates. Knowledge and experience are therefore produced simultaneously. Burrington describes the work as “a guide to practising the everyday magic of seeing the internet as part of a city’s landscape and daily life” (Burrington, 2016: 11).

Burrington’s work also extends participatory walking into the political realm. *Networks* are not treated merely as technical arrangements but as structures shaped by inequality, surveillance, and access. Burrington explains that the hopeful promise associated with the expanding internet depends on equal access. Yet, as the examples in the field guide demonstrate, access to networks is not distributed equally. Since the internet is largely owned by private companies, there is little financial incentive to recognise it as a public right. The increasing presence and complexity of urban surveillance systems further indicate that network technologies can restrict freedom as much as they enable it. In cities such as New York, these systems are particularly inclined to monitor and target minority communities (Burrington, 2016).

The walk proposed by Burrington therefore extends beyond a simple exploratory activity intended to identify technical objects in the city. As participants move through the streets, they begin to recognise not only the material traces of internet infrastructure but also the social and political order on which

that infrastructure depends. Walking thus becomes a critical practice of reading that renders relations of power visible through technical indicators dispersed across the everyday surfaces of urban space.

When the works of Cardiff and Burrington are considered together, participatory walking can be seen to generate different forms of knowledge. Her *Long Black Hair* organises the participant’s movement through sound, photography, and narrative, thereby transforming both the perception of the environment and the experience of time. *Networks of New York*, by contrast, turns walking into an investigative mode of reading that deciphers technical signs embedded in the urban surface. In Cardiff’s work, the participant uses embodied experience to complete the perceptual gaps between recorded narrative and the live environment. In Burrington’s work, the participant connects material indicators in the surroundings in order to understand how otherwise invisible networks operate.

The first work produces sensory and temporal knowledge, whereas the second generates infrastructural and political knowledge. In both cases, the artwork remains incomplete independently of the participant’s movement. However, walking serves different functions in each work. In one, it constructs perceptual experience; in the other, it renders urban systems legible. This comparison demonstrates that participation through walking in contemporary art is not a uniform mode of experience but a methodological and conceptual practice that varies according to the problem addressed by each artwork.

5. Conclusion

The examples examined throughout this study demonstrate that walking cannot be reduced to a fixed artistic category. Rather, it is an open-ended practice that acquires different functions in different contexts. In some cases, it emerges as a direct political intervention or a conceptual gesture; in others, it operates as a performative structure that organises participatory experience or as an investigative method that renders invisible infrastructures legible. Walking in contemporary art is therefore not merely a theme or an instrument. It constitutes a formative ground that transforms the logic of artistic production, the relationship established with the viewer, and the ways in which space is understood. From this perspective, the first conclusion to be drawn is that walking functions as a conceptual practice and expands the meaning of the artwork through embodied experience.

In the works of Galindo and Alÿs, walking produces political meaning by leaving traces in public space. However, the character and function of these traces differ. Galindo's bloodstained footprints form an embodied record that carries suppressed violence into the present, whereas Alÿs's painted line constitutes a temporary spatial intervention that suggests that borders are neither natural nor immutable. In the works of Cardiff and Miller and Burrington, walking is constructed through the participant's movement. In the first case, the participant establishes perceptual connections between recorded sound and the live environment, past and present, and photography and the existing landscape. In the second, the participant begins to read the material structure of invisible networks by comparing technical indicators encountered in the surroundings. These comparisons demonstrate that walking does not produce meaning in a single, uniform manner in contemporary art.

This perspective requires walking to be reconsidered within artistic practice. Walking is neither merely the movement of the body from one point to another nor simply a tool through which an artist realises a preconceived idea. It is a methodological practice in which meaning is produced through movement and develops through the artist's or participant's encounters with space. The surface of the route, the rhythm of movement, the people, sounds, and objects encountered, systems of guidance, and spatial restrictions are not incidental details external to the production process. They participate in the formation of the conceptual structure of the artwork. Walking therefore enables the establishment of new relationships and the production of embodied and situated forms of knowledge rather than merely representing a previously established idea. In this respect, walking should be understood through the relationships it establishes and the experience it

produces in motion, rather than solely through the content it represents.

Another conclusion of the study is that space does not constitute a neutral ground that merely accompanies walking. In the examples examined, public space emerges as a structure interwoven with traces of the past, political boundaries, systems of guidance, forms of surveillance, and technical networks. Walking makes these layers experientially accessible and open to discussion through the body. The city consequently ceases to appear as a unified structure understood from above and instead becomes visible as a field that unfolds through walking, acquires meaning through encounters among different relationships, and is continuously shaped by power. The critical character of artistic walking becomes particularly evident through this process of rendering spatial relations visible.

Participatory walks also transform the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. The participant is not an observer positioned outside the work but becomes an active subject who walks, stops, listens, compares, and interprets signs within the surrounding environment. Participation, however, should not be understood as an entirely free and unrestricted experience. Devices such as routes, sounds, maps, photographs, and guides direct the participant's movement to varying degrees. The artwork is formed through the relationship between this pre-established structure, the participant's personal experience, and the changing conditions of the live environment. In this sense, participation does not involve freely shaping the work but activating an organised structure through embodied experience. This finding requires approaches that directly equate participation with freedom to be reconsidered. The participant's agency emerges through negotiation between the arrangement constructed by the artist and individual experience.

The temporary nature of walking also reintroduces the question of how an artwork continues to exist. Once a walk has ended, photographs, maps, audio recordings, written accounts, or temporary traces may remain. These documents, however, are not entirely identical to the experience of walking itself. This distinction opens the relationships between artwork and document, experience and representation, and trace and erasure to critical discussion. The transience of walking does not diminish its artistic impact. On the contrary, it connects the persistence of the artwork less to a permanent object than to processes of remembering, re-experiencing, and interpretation.

Future research may focus more closely on how walking is experienced by different bodies. Examining how freedom of movement is shaped by social position, safety, physical ability, and economic conditions could further develop the critical dimensions

of artistic walking. The guidance of participants, the collection of personal data, digital tracking technologies, and surveillance systems may also be investigated in relation to the ethical implications of walking-based artistic practices. In addition, the relationships that walking establishes with ecological environments, non-human beings, soundscapes, and changing technological infrastructures open new areas of inquiry. Comparative studies of walking practices conducted in different geographical contexts could reveal cultural differences in the relationships among movement, local history, collective memory, and public space. The functions identified in this study may also be examined through a broader range of artists, geographical settings, and participant groups in order to discuss how walking is reconfigured according to context. Such research would make visible not only the methodological role of walking in artistic production but also its ethical, social, and technological limits.

In conclusion, walking in contemporary art is not tied to a single aesthetic language or function. In each example, walking establishes different relationships between the artwork, spatial experience, and the viewer, reconfiguring both the meaning of the work and the viewer's position within it. The principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating this diversity through the methodological and conceptual functions that walking acquires according to context. This perspective makes it possible to understand walking not merely as a subject of art but as a critical mode of production through which historical, political, perceptual, and technical relationships are investigated by the body in motion.

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