

Wild walking: a twofold critique of the walk-along method

Phillip Vannini and April Vannini

Keywords: Walk-along, go-along, video, maps, Scotland, walking as method, wildness, psychogeography, weather, Hamish Fulton

Over the last decade the mobile research method known as the “go-along” (in its various manifestations such as the “ride-along” and the “walk-along”) has become increasingly popular. The popularity of the go-along makes great sense in light of evolving theoretical and substantive agendas across the social sciences toward embodied, sensory, and mobile ways of knowing (e.g. see Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2010). Walking has a tremendous potential to animate spatial and sensory dynamics which static modes of inquiry cannot quite scrutinize. Nevertheless, not all is well and right with walk-alongs.

As we will argue in this chapter, much of the methodological literature on walk-alongs and a great deal of the actual research conducted through walk-alongs still suffer from many of the same ailments that go-along methods were devised to cure. Walk-alongs, by and in large, are still too often informed by textualism, cognitivism, and representationalism. Walk-alongs are too often not sensuous enough, not spatialized enough, not mediated coherently enough, and not imaginative enough. Walk-alongs are also often too methodical, systematic, and pre-determined by a priori research agendas. Take for example this excerpt from the method section of a recent walk-along study which we reproduce nearly in full to evidence the style and orientation of the research approach:

Three researchers conducted the walk-along interviews: a faculty member and two graduate assistants. Each graduate assistant received instruction and shadowed before conducting an independent one-to-one go-along interview. The interviews lasted an average of 48 minutes (range = 24 to 88 minutes). [...] Each interview began with an exercise that included “warm-up” questions about where to find a snack on campus; this was done to familiarize participants with the format of a go-along interview. The interview guide comprised four primary questions for the go-along interview on sexual health resources: [...] (d) You’ve given me a lot of examples of sexual health resources at [name of college]. Can you tell me what your top five most important or helpful resources on campus would be, including what is actually here and any other ideas you might have? When the participant named a specific resource, the researcher asked to be shown it, and the two walked to the physical resource or went to a computer for online resources (Garcia et al. 2012, 1397-1398).

In this paper we present a twofold critique to the walk-along method. Because we believe that walking is an embodied way of knowing, in what follows we each speak from our own embodied perspective, voice, and viewpoint. Thus, following this introduction we each follow a trail of our own in developing our own individual critiques of the walk-along method. Phillip’s critique focuses on enlivening the kinesthetic and cinematic potential of the walk-along method, whereas April’s critique concentrates on rethinking the very notion of walking as method. Regardless of our individual perspectives, we write our reflections on the basis of a shared event: a walk in Scotland’s Cairngorms National Park together with Chris Townsend, a British walker known worldwide for his multi-day walks.

Though our arguments and critiques are distinct, they are similarly inspired by that walk with Chris and similarly motivated by our will to rethink the nature of walk-alongs and to reimagine walking as a “wilder” way of knowing.

Cinema = movement

Phillip Vannini

***The video referenced in the pages below can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/129221257>

Show, don't just tell!

A few years ago I found out about Munro bagging through the fieldwork of Hayden Lorimer and Katrin Lund (Lorimer and Lund 2008). I found this practice fascinating. Driven by a desire to learn more about it, and by the intention to learn more about “wildness” in the context of Scottish hillwalking together with April, I thought of asking Chris (and later two other hillwalkers, Mike and David) to go for day-long walks on the Highlands. Moreover, in an attempt to sense the world of hill-walking differently than Lund and Lorimer had, and in the hope of acquiring a new skill, I brought along video gear.

The notion of “wildness” is a tricky one and we ought to be as careful stepping over it as if it were a treacherous and exposed mountain path. In Western culture, notions of the “wild” and “wilderness” have long been reputed to refer to “empty” spaces devoid of culture, signs of civilization and development, and human presence. Yet, as critics have pointed out, these notions are nothing but political myths that have regularly resulted in erasing “Others” (e.g. indigenous people) and in blindly reinforcing an artificial nature-culture binary (for a review see Vannini and Vannini 2016). Peak-bagging, like many other ways in which people strive to “conquer” wild natural environments, is an activity underscored by colonial, androcentric, and anthropocentric ideologies that risk perpetuating the perilous idea that nature is an inert object waiting to be possessed, tamed, and classified (Lorimer and Lund 2008).

Nonetheless, mountains and similarly “wild” places around the globe continue to exercise a powerful pull over the popular imagination (MacFarlane 2008, 2009). Whether or not places like the Scottish highlands and their tallest hills and mountains can be objectively considered wild or not is truly not the important point for the throngs of walkers and tourists seduced by their awe-inspiring appeal. As MacFarlane puts it, it is less about the presence of social development and the clear absence of humans and their history and culture from these places, and much more about the subjective feeling of being alive in a place animated by at least a modicum of self-will (the idea at the etymological root of the words “wild”) that wildness—as a process rich with vitality and unpredictability—depends. It is in this sense that we set out for a walk in a “wild” place.

Cameras, lenses, filters, field recorders, shotgun microphones equipped with wind screens, and related technologies are increasingly becoming recognized as essential tools of the walk-along method. Technologies such as these, as well as GIS, GPS, and other tools which blur the boundaries between arts and sciences are now starting to become incorporated into mobile approaches with promising results (e.g. see Evans and Jones 2011; Jones et al. 2008). These tools have all been used with different intents by different researchers.

For my part I view video as a way of sensing the lifeworld¹ differently. Differently, that is, than the typical mode of academic apprehension of the lifeworld: writing. Writing demands a logocentric way of knowing. Writing asks you to search for *words*: experiential traces that are spoken, felt, or thought. Writing forces you to learn about the lifeworld in a way that can be subject to description and abstraction, to data analysis and interpretation, to literature accumulation and theory.

Filming, as an aesthetic practice, works differently. Filming demands a different sensuous way of knowing than writing does. Filming asks you—indeed it can do nothing else—to tune your attention to bodily and material surfaces that can be seen or heard. Filming pulls you into a lifeworld that does not think; a lifeworld that can only *move* in myriad ways and *speak* in a cacophony of sounds and languages. Cameras and microphones are therefore potentially able to teach us to feel something different about a place. And herein lies the premise of my main critique of the walk-along method as is most often practiced within the social sciences today. But to be clear, I am not necessarily going to argue for the need to utilize video cameras *more* as part of a walk-along. Video-recording a walk-along is in fact not at all an unprecedented strategy.

The best known practitioner of this approach is Sarah Pink, who a few years ago referred to the practice of filming walk-alongs as the “video tour” (Pink 2008). In a 2008 writing she describes it as such:

The video tour is a collaborative method that involves walking around a specific place with a research participant. The research encounter is video recorded, by the researcher, and amongst other things might focus on aspects of the physical and multisensorial environment as ways of exploring material/sensorial practices and meanings, and place-making (Pink 2008, 7).

After images from a walk-along are video-recorded there are two options available to a researcher. And it is at this junction where my true critique comes into play.

Sarah Pink’s words (Pink 2007, 2008a, 2008b) can be used to describe the first direction one may take. “In this context,” Pink (2007, 243) observes with regard to the act of walking with a video camera, “video is not merely a method of audio-visually recording people and physical settings. Rather... walking with video provides ways of (to paraphrase Feld and Basso 1996, 91) sensing place, placing senses, sensorially making place and making sense of place.” Reinforcing this point, elsewhere, Pink (2008a, 2) writes: “the method of video recording research participants while ‘walking with’ them creates place on different levels: in a phenomenological sense during the research encounter; in the form of the video representation of that encounter; and again through the subjectivity of the viewer of that video.” Now, the trouble with this approach is that there is way too little emphasis what *video does*, and not enough emphasis on *doing video*, that is, on editing and sharing video recorded as part of walk-alongs.

In fact, despite the use of a video camera during data collection, rather than cinematic representations *it is most often soundless and still photographic representations that such walks seem to yield in the published literature*. For example in Pink (2007) we get just four still frames from the video

¹ Within phenomenological traditions “lifeworld” refers to a universe that houses subjects’ experiences. As opposed to the more generic idea of “world” the notion of “lifeworld” underscores a horizon of unfolding feeling, sensation, consciousness, and perception.

clips shot in the field. In Pink (2008a) only one color photograph is shown, whereas in Pink (2008b) only four black and white photographs are available. Others follow a similar path. Witmore (2004) has a few more photographs, a total of 10, but no video either. More recent studies seem to go down the same road of turning cinematic recordings into static representations. For example Yi'En (2014), despite using video while on the field, releases only photographic stills and sets of video frames. The list could go on, but the point would remain the same: in spite of all the recorded walking, only frozen visual depictions are made public. And in spite of all the talking, it is soundless textual transcriptions that can be found in the literature. And this, for me, is a serious problem.

This is where a second course of action appears to be necessary. The alternative to the textualization of video is rather simple: if video of a walk is taken, video should be edited and shown. Cinema evokes movement, rhythm, and tactile contact with the ground (e.g. terrain and landscape surfaces) and with the air (e.g. changing light and weather) in a way that photographs and writing cannot. Moreover, cinema (except for silent versions) includes sound-recording and therefore gives off a sonic impression of places and voices, with their unique texture, pitch, volume, intonation, cadence, grain, and rhythm. Cinema, in short, allows for a richer—modally speaking—apprehension of what it is like “walk with” someone, somewhere.

Though I am confident in the value of my opinion I am not so naive to think that producing, editing, and publishing video from walk-alongs is an invariably “better” option than writing or displaying photographs. Yet, having experienced firsthand what it is like to walk with a camera, and what it is like to narrate a tale from the field through video editing, I am certain in the value of this strategy of knowledge generation. To be sure, video is difficult to shoot and edit, yet it is getting easier and easier every day, and perhaps it is not more difficult than writing clearly and evocatively. Video and editing equipment can also be expensive. Yet it is not just as expensive as travelling to an international conference or two. Video production is time consuming as well, but so is doing ethnography as a whole. And certainly video is hard to publish and distribute widely, even though all that it really takes to make it accessible is uploading it on the Internet to a website like Vimeo or YouTube, copying a URL, and pasting that URL somewhere on the pages of an article or a chapter (not to mention that more and more journals nowadays actively solicit video content for their websites and are all too happy to embed Vimeo or YouTube content). In sum, taking video, and actually editing it and showing it in the shape of a narrative seems like a feasible way to evoke sensations of movement.

Walking with a camera

To deepen my argument I want to reflect on what it is like to actually walk with a camera for the sake of recording footage editable into a short documentary. Walking with a camera is like walking with an extension of your body and of your senses (as countless people have observed). A video camera can apprehend movement differently than any other medium. Video has the potential to animate the experience of place, an encounter with a person, and the sensations unfolding throughout the act of walking in a richly sensuous way. Video—I should note—is not intended to mimic or faithfully represent the experience of being there. Because video and film are an impression of movement—based on the playing back of still images at high speed (24, 25, or 30 frames per second, normally) video is an illusion, not a copy, of movement and rhythm.

Let us focus a bit longer on the issue of rhythm. Each walk has its distinct rhythms. Cold legs at the start of a walk will slow you down and force you to fight against the ideal pace you should be keeping. Later, a fully warmed-up body will allow you to settle into a comfortable rhythm. Then there are the many breaks you end up taking: moments when you will find yourself struggling between the need to rest and the urge to go on before your legs go cold again. And then there are the last miles of the day, when your feet, knees, and back will start to feel pain and fatigue.

Add to all this the rhythms of your mental wanderings, which often seem to have a will of their own. As Edensor (2010, 70) finds: “the rhythms of walking allow for a particular experiential flow of successive moments of detachment and attachment, physical immersion and mental wandering, memory, recognition and strangeness.” Walking, therefore, consists of weaving a spatial as much as a temporal path, a path contingent on both the physical characteristics of a place and the rhythmic and durational intensities in which it is kinesthetically stitched together. These are the rhythms evoked through the short video filmed throughout our time in Scotland.

Walking with a video camera has its own unique rhythm, however, rhythms that are distinct from the act of walking without a video camera. When filming I—normally a slow but steady kind of linear walker—have to walk like a yo-yo: one moment ahead of everybody to take a shot from the front, the next moment lagging behind, slowed down by having to record a vista or a minute detail of the landscape.

The camera has a rhythm too, one that is not necessarily the same as the one preferred by its operator. Cameras do not like to move very much. This is ironic for a cinematic medium (let us remember that the word “cinema” originates from the Greek word for movement). Camera movement causes shakiness and possibly loss of focus, which in turn cause viewers dizziness and headaches. The irony is double: when a camera represents movement faithfully (albeit with ugly results), a viewer will perceive the movement as unfaithful to the conventions of good cinema, of good movement. When a camera represents the movements of walking artificially (for example while gliding on a dolly), a viewer will perceive that movement as faithful. So once again, video works as an illusion.

For the video camera walking unfolds as constant up and down motion that throws foreground and background out of sync. As a result walking with a video camera in order to shoot steady and editable images is taught to novices as a movement unlike normal walking: a movement more or less locked in at the hips, with the buttocks carrying the center of gravity low and even, and with both feet moving forward sideways out like a goose in order to avoid the springing up and down caused by the cyclical action of left and right calf muscles.

Largely inimical to normal pedestrian rhythms, cameras generally like to rest on comfortable tripods whence they can gaze at the movement unfolding before them just like a spectator safely removed from the scene. And this intermittent positioning in turn forces their human operators to engage in the constant back-and-forth on a trail described above, interspersed with bouts of awkward hip-locked walking, and occasionally having to run in order to catch up. My point is that none of this, absolutely none of this important experience of the walk-along with a video camera, will be communicated if video is not edited and shown, and turned instead into still frames.

Weathering whether

Something else happens when you walk outdoors with a camera with the intent of editing a short narrative video, something that can profoundly challenge your walking rhythms: weather. The methodological literature on walk-alongs is teeming with warnings about the vagaries of weather. Exposure to the elements—rain, wind, heat, cold, snow, and ice—are anathema to a systematic and efficient interview, it seems. These factors are undoubtedly some of the biggest “con’s” to a method that is otherwise rich in “pro’s.” Carpiano (2009) for example writes that weather can present serious obstacles to the conduction of a good walk-along interview both during winter and summer. Garcia and colleagues (Garcia et al. 2012) point out that the weather can present “environmental limitations” and “disruptions,” which can make the walk-along method “vulnerable” and “susceptible” to challenges (2012, 1400). As challenging as weather may be, to think of it as a limitation and a disruption is to entirely miss the point of a walk-along. While it is true that we ourselves postponed our initially scheduled walk with Chris due to a massive snowstorm—which would have made walking in the mountains very dangerous—in the end the story told by our video would not have been the same without the wildness of Scottish weather.

While reflecting on the temporalities of walking, Edensor (2010, 72) argues that walkers “attune themselves to the rhythmicity of the moment through breathing, gestures, pace of movement, speech.” Those who experience walk-alongs with a video camera—as explained in the paragraphs above—also need to attune themselves to the rhythmical exigencies of their recording technologies. Of course in a weather-less space there would be little need to continuously adapt to. But on a mountain, and a fickle-weather Scottish mountain to boot, the necessities of maintaining such flow by recording successive movements have clear impacts upon the walking body. Changing weather demands stopping to dry and clean lenses and filters. Tricky passages on uneven trails and icy terrain require a camera be sheathed away for safety. Cold temperatures compel the use of gloves—though operating a zoom lens with manual focus demands bare-handed tactile precision. Scrambling on rocks and unstable paths means needing both hands for safe gripping, which means stopping once again to store away a camera or perhaps swap a handheld one for a head- or chest-mounted GoPro. It is in this way that “the specific affordances of place,” “the variability of the surface underfoot, the unevenness of the fixtures blocking a seamless path,” and the moods of weather push the body (of both human and camera) “along certain routes, disrupt and facilitate its progress, cajole it into certain gaits and manoeuvres and in other ways produce a particular rhythmic or arrhythmic beat” (Edensor 2010, 73; also see Vergunst 2008).

In simple words, weather is not a limitation of the functionality of the walk-along method. Weather is part and parcel of the walk-along method. And walking with video with the intent of editing it and sharing it magnifies even more the importance of weather in the context of the walk-along. The sound of wind or footsteps on snow, raindrops or snowflakes touching the lens, and fog banks shifting before the eye of the camera are all movements of the lifeworld that cinema—over photography, and over still frames—is remarkably well-equipped to evoke.

“We cannot see things unless we first can see” Ingold (2005, 99) reminds us, “and we cannot see unless we are immersed, from the start, in what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘the soil of the sensible’—that is, in a ground of being in which self and world are initially commingled (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 160).” We cannot film things, we might say, unless we can first see and hear, and we cannot see and hear unless we are aware of being immersed in a ground of being, moving, and becoming in which self, other, and world are commingled—indeed a *lifeworld*. This ground is nothing more and nothing less than the

spaces and places where we walk with others. The filmed walk-along is nothing more and nothing less than simply this process of commingling.

Walk-alongs are an essential “part of an attempt to take the study of eyesight”—as well as hearing, touch, movement, and balance—“back where it belongs, out of doors” (Ingold 2005, 97). Touched by weather, our perception of the world, while outdoors, “is invariably multisensory” (Ingold 2005, 97). We don’t feel the weather, we feel *in* weather, Ingold (2005) observes. To wish that the weather would stop bothering us is to wish for the cessation of our hearing, seeing, touching, and feeling altogether. It is to wish that the transcribed text of an interview would show up on our desk without us having to get our feet wet and our hands cold. It is to wish that the walk-along interview would be more about the interview than the walking, the still pictures rather than the moving ones.

To recap my argument, the practice of filming a walk-along has a great potential for teaching us how to sense the lifeworld and how to relate to a human being along whom we walk. Cinema—a medium which focuses on movement—is capable of apprehending kinesthetic practices such as walking in a way that writing and photography cannot match. But for cinema to generate useful knowledge that is sensorially rich, it must be edited, shared, and shown.

Cinema, moreover, has the enormous potential to enliven what is essentially unique about life in the open: weather. Still photographic representations and soundless writing cannot animate weather in the same way that cinema does. A more sensuous understanding of the walk-along than the one that seems to currently dominate within the social sciences would treat weather as an inseparable component of the embodied and emplaced experience of walking rather as a limitation of this method, and would actively generate cinematic tales of video-recorded walks rather than turn them into still and muted moments that are frozen in time.

Walking beyond method

April Vannini

A glance at the map

Insert figure 1 here

Figure 1: Memory-Mapping the Walk

We are here, in the Scottish Highlands, to walk. Not to execute a component of our research design. Not to conduct a walk-along interview. Not to systematically engage in data collection. No; much more simply, we are here to get to know Chris and explore with him the Cairngorms National Park. The act of walking is not the problem with the so-called “walk-along.” The problem with the walk-along lies in treating walking as an instrumental methodological procedure.

To avoid this problem, following the inspiration of Truman and Springgay (2016) I want to ask: what if we referred to walk-alongs as an “event activity” rather than a method, interview technique, or means of data collection? In treating walking as a means to gather data in the traditional sense the act of walking becomes detached from both body and place, and this reduces walking to a set of overly-planned instrumental protocols and procedures.

The reduction of walk-alongs to an instrumental method is not an uncommon phenomenon in the social sciences. McCormack (2008, 4), for example, observes:

Admittedly, as a set of disciplinary associations straddling the natural and social sciences, much of geography has striven to conduct research according to a set of protocols—objectivity, detachment, disembodied distance—designed to reduce as much as possible the influence of body, affect, emotion, and feeling on the clarity and acuity of thought. Yet as has been extensively demonstrated, the practice and craft of geographical thinking is sustained by a range of corporeal, perceptual, and affective processes, including walking, seeing, and touching.

I agree with McCormack (2008). To be fair, my polemic is fueled by nothing but my personal preference for embodied ways of knowing that authentically and boldly push the boundaries of innovation. Examples of these more-than-representational ways of knowing have accumulated in the art world over many years, as I will describe shortly. Inspired by this growing tradition my arguments here are hopeful and positive. I, in other words, wish to continue seeing and hearing walk-alongs. But I want to see and hear walk-alongs that are more kinesthetic, more vivid, more sensuous, and more entangled with the material world than they currently are. If my critique is too personal, too radical, too ambitious, perhaps too indulgent, I am guilty as charged. Yet, I believe, there is tremendous value in developing and practicing embodied ways of knowing that do more than pay lip service to a set of ideals.

With this short critique I want to imagine ways of knowing that unfold as more than just opportunistic ways of squeezing interview data out of research participants' minds. Without pretending to have found ideal solutions, and without arrogantly attempting to teach my readers on the basis of nothing but the little and barely adequate walking that I have practiced in the Scottish Highlands, I write this chapter as a tentative outing, an inspired meandering, a fearless adventure of sorts. However, mine is not just a writing. Too much of go-along research methodology is encoded into nothing but words. Rather than just a written trace therefore I present you also with a cartographic evocation of our journey, the map displayed above.

This map is not a realist representation of our walk. It is a memory map punctuated by landmarks and bodily traces that a single day out in the mountains will leave impressed upon the land and upon walking bodies. A map, not unlike a walk, that is shaped as a rhythmic sequence of steps marked by different speeds and changing terrain, by the curves of a trail, and by the weaving together of multiple walkers' movements. Rather than a linear and realist cartographic representation this map has all the characteristics of a wild walk out in the open, a walk that feels more like wayfaring than a kind of pre-planned transition from point A to point B (see Ingold 2010). A walk that feels more like an event, and less of a method for getting somewhere that is determined in advance. It is a map for a wild walk marked by embodied characteristics such as fatigue, pain from blisters, moments of feeling lost, exposure to meteorological events, and fear of falling and getting hurt.

Meeting fellow walkers along the trail

Before we get too comfortable in our initial steps, it behooves us to realize the trail we want to follow has been opened a long time before we have attempted to walk on it. At times it might appear from the

social scientific literature that walking as mode of inquiry is a recent idea. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Walking as a way of knowing is something that has been practiced by indigenous peoples for centuries. As Careri (2009, 44) states: “the histories of the origins of man [sic] is a history of walking, of migrations of people and cultural and religious exchanges that took place along intercontinental trajectories.” For instance, Australian aboriginal cultural stories are traced in the landscape through a system of routes that are mapped throughout the entire continent. Extensive knowledge of the land and the cultural stories and traditions has been created there through an intricate system of “path-stories”:

Every mountain, river, and spring belongs to a complex system of *path-stories*—*song-lines*—that continuously interweave to form a single “history of Dream Time,” the stories of the origins of mankind [sic]. Each of these paths are connected to a song, and each song is connected to one or more mythological tales set in the territory (Careri 2009, 44).

For Careri (2009) walking is even at the roots of architecture, since the first construction of space began with human beings wandering in the Palaeolithic landscape, following traces and leaving trails.

Ethnographers, mobile or otherwise, have not even been the first career intellectuals to utilize walking as a means to generate new knowledge. Walking as a way to form new thoughts, to gather ideas, and engage in the creation and sharing of knowledge is a very old tradition in philosophy. Nietzsche, for example, often wrote and reflected on walking and on movement as a writing practice. In *The Gay Science* (1974, 322) he famously wrote: “we do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors—walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lovely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful.” Elsewhere he also put it in more concise and memorable terms: “All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking” (1889, Aphorism 34). Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau once “claimed to be incapable of thinking properly, of composing, creating or finding inspiration except *when walking*” (see Gros 2014, 65). And how could we forget about Martin Heidegger, who thought of his notorious forest hikes as a mode of thinking and often reflected in writing on the very idea of thinking by drawing upon walking metaphors (Sharr 2007).

Crossing a bridge

Arts-based practices such as creative writing, performance, and visual arts have often explored walking as a mode of inquiry as well. One of the most prominent aesthetic walking practices was initiated by the psychogeography Avant Garde group known as the Situationist International (SI): a collective made famous by Guy Debord (O’Rourke 2013; Smith 2013; Wark 2011). Intended as a game, Debord devised an urban walking technique called the “drift” or “*dérive*” whereby participants would gain sensuous knowledge about a whole city or a single neighbourhood. This was a type of exploration intended to create countercultural forms of mapping. Mapping, as a form of resistance, was thought to be capable of reconfiguring the social and political geographies of the sites that one visited and in turn to provoke new forms of engagement with cityscapes. Such “drifts” could also give life to a deeper recognition of the psychogeographical properties of place, thus allowing one to connect with invisible and intangible connections between spaces (Lucas 2008). As Smith (2013, 106) recognizes, the SI inspiration has had a

lasting impact on artists and urban explorers, “particularly their idea of “psychogeography:” the “pseudo-scientific intuiting of the city’s atmospheres and driving ambiances.” Often nowadays artists use newly-available locative technologies to create maps based on the practice of a drift, as in Conor McGarrigle’s 2012 project *Walkspace: Beirut-Venice* (see Evans 2012; also see Richardson 2015).

Now, if meeting other walkers along the trail has perhaps inspired you to cross the bridge into the art world, then do take a quick glance at David Evans’s (2012) edited book on how walking has been used in contemporary art and you will soon realize there are myriad ways in which peripatetic practices are being used as imaginative modes of inquiry. From Jeremy Deller, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, and Marina Abramović and Ulay, to Janet Cardiff, Fiona Robison, and Francis Alÿs. This is not only a practice taken up by prolific artists. Many artists, groups, and collectives are working with perambulatory practices to engage communities and experiment with walking practices, such as Toronto-based artists *The Department of Biological Flow (DOBF)*. DOBF artists Sean Smith and Barbara Fornssler use walking, performance, and video in projects like *Gait Surfing I* (2008) and *Kino-Gait Study No. 3* (2009)² as a means to create and experiment with walking as an aesthetic, non-representational practice and in order to experience walking in different ways. More and more artists are crowding streets and paths in an effort to engage in walking as an open-ended and fluid mode of inquiry. Within the social sciences, there are also a few scholars who have begun to pay attention to this art world (see *Visual Studies* 2010).

Finding more walking partners along the way

Artist Hamish Fulton has deeply influenced many of the styles of contemporary art walking. Fulton carried out his first aesthetic walk in 1967, a unique practice characterized by his reticence to leave traces other than footprints. Fulton believes that art is in the walk itself (see Smith 2013, 108). He does not consider himself a writer, a photographer, or a land artist (Fulton 2010). He clarifies his stance thus: “a walk has a life of its own and does not need to be materialized into a work of art” (Schneider 2013, n.p.), “my artform is the short journey—made by walking the landscape” (Wilson 2002, 21). Fulton’s website (<http://www.hamish-fulton.com/>), dedicated to his unique ambulatory art practice, shows how Fulton lives his art through his feet since for him “an object (artwork) cannot compete with an experience” (Enjalran 2015, 17).

In writing about Hamish Fulton’s artistic practice Enjalran (2015) draws from the work of John Dewey in order to make sense of Fulton’s understanding and perception of walking as an embodied practice and aesthetic experience that is distinct from artwork intended as object. Enjalran (2015, 17) writes: “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 viewers [and that] ‘without external embodiment, an experience remains incomplete.’” Over the years Fulton refined his artistic walking practice by defining his process as *pure experience*:

² <http://www.departmentofbiologicalflow.net/gait-surfing-i/>
<http://www.departmentofbiologicalflow.net/kino-gait/>

only art resulting from the experience of individual walks./Only=Not a generalized response to nature./art resulting from=First the walk second the artwork./the experience of= A walk must be experienced it cannot be imagined./ individual walks=Each walk has a beginning and an end” (in Wilson 2002, 21).

Fulton’s walking practice reminds us of the walking experiences of our newly-made friend Chris Townsend. Both have walked the Cairngorms, both have used their practice as a way to raise political and environmental awareness, both are keen on seeking out wild spaces. Hamish and Chris also have similar perspectives on the significance of walking. There is no doubt that walking is more than a hobby for both of them. Chris writes books about the landscape and long distance walks he pursues, he writes about the places he encounters, the people he meets, and he provides knowledgeable guidance for others wanting to explore wild spaces. His knowledge is gathered through his practice, through his feet.

Fulton’s walking practice is embodied in his experiences of over 300 art walks in 20 countries including: Tibet, Bolivia, Nepal, Japan, England, Iceland, Austria, Canada, Peru, United States, and Australia. Like for Chris Townsend, for Hamish Fulton walking is about transforming one’s state of mind:

I see walking as my form of meditation. If we were going into the mountains and there was no trail, then we wouldn’t be able to think very much, because we would be paying attention to not breaking an ankle or falling over. Then walking becomes meditative. You stop the endless thinking mind. And that’s a good thing—because every now and then you want to stop going down the same neural pathways. Then you have other perceptions (cited in Sooke 2012).

Fulton’s artistic walking practice is fully emergent and only pre-determined by points of departure and arrival. As is the case for Chris’s, Fulton’s photography is used—very sparingly—as a means to remember the walk but not as a representation or archive of a walk. What we can see from his walks in a gallery are just a few photographs with the addition of brief words. According to Enjalran (2015, 18) “by adding words to these images, he soon undermines their representative and contemplative purpose. The text then becomes the image’s equal, not in order not to represent but rather to reconstruct, allowing the viewer to connect with the walk.” The words and descriptions of his walk come directly from his journal: a raw evocation of impressions, encounters, observations, and factual information. As Enjalran (2015, 17) explains:

It is then the natural environment that influences and determines the course of events. Dates and numbers have a certain importance. They are found everywhere in his photos, wall paintings and books. They structure the artist’s relationship with time and space in his work. They give a sense of the walk, its rhythm. Because walking is also experiencing time _walk equals time_, and duration, and what better medium than photography to reconstruct this experience?

A brief pause inside a bothy

Listening to Chris reflect on his walking practice and his encounters with wild spaces, we soon realize that his practice is a mode of inquiry similarly to open-ended and emergent ethnographic fieldwork. Chris walks to learn about places.

Feeling lost: are we going in the right direction?

As I write about walk-alongs as a method, I cannot help but feeling like an imposter. Though I am a walker and I have both enjoyed long distance and short walks, walking as a mode of inquiry is something that Chris does far better than I do—enduring longer distances, undergoing deeper contemplation, and engaging in freer reflection thanks to his tremendous amount of experience with walking in a much broader and less-restricted field. Chris is indeed the walking “methodologist,” not I.

Phillip and I are simply tag-a-longers. We—despite our good intentions—are still overly pre-occupied with producing an outcome: a filmic evocation of our encounter. This is especially the case for Phillip, whose presence behind the camera is making him virtually absent on the trail. Chris is the one who is truly walking.

Taking a final break

As I near the conclusion of our walk, I would like to return to the idea that walk-alongs should not be considered a method of gathering data but rather something that unfolds as a sensorial event. Reducing walk-alongs to a method of data collection fails to fulfill the learning potential of this mode of inquiry because it predetermines the type and quality of understanding that may take place as walking organically unfolds. This pre-determination is antithetical to qualitative inquiry since this way of knowing is meant to be an emergent process.

By treating walking and walk-alongs as a “method” we limit the sensory potential of this mode of inquiry even before the walk begins. The notion of “method” implies a systematic and instrumental way of collecting data subservient to a well-defined research question and scope. It objectifies those with whom we walk as research participants, and it turns our own walking bodies into research instruments subservient to the need to collect data and reach a conclusion. I agree with Truman and Springgay (2016) who suggest that walking as a mode of inquiry should be considered a propositional act. Following the work of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, Truman and Springgay (2016, 266) suggest that:

Walking as propositions triggers conditions of emergence activating self-organizing potential that invents its own parameters (Manning 2013). Methodologically, this is quite different from giving directions, collecting data, or establishing pre-determined methods. Walking propositionally demands that we conceive of research happening in the now. Research thus becomes “an occasion for experience holds [that] [sic] within its potential the dynamics of singularity” (Manning 2008, 6).³ Walking sets in motion a variety of bodily movements, intensities, and affects that unfold and extend new variations.

³ This quote should read: “an occasion for experience [that] holds within its potential the dynamics of singularity.” It appears that the original sentence was improperly corrected by the quoting writers.

To sum it up, I believe we should be wary of engaging in walk-alongs as acts of walking-and-interviewing. What we should strive for is something much broader and deeper than an “interview on the go.” We should rather go somewhere to feel a place, sense a landscape and its weather, and encounter a human being with whom we choose to walk. To think of walking as just a novel technique for conducting an interview is simply the easiest way to forget about walking as the aesthetic and exploratory practice—the wild practice—that it really is.

Afterthought

You may have noticed that every chapter of this book is accompanied by a photograph. When we too were asked to submit a photograph we balked at the thought of turning our video into a frozen representation—a course of action that would have contradicted everything we said in this chapter. But instead of digging our heels in, April insightfully suggested we publish a photo from a time lapse that I had shot in Scotland. What would be the point in doing that? In order to explain we need to turn to a 1976 article printed in the journal *CoEvolutionary Quarterly*; the result of a conversation between Stewart Brand, Gregory Bateson, and Margaret Mead.

Mead and Bateson were married in 1936 after meeting and falling in love in 1932 while they were conducting fieldwork in New Guinea. The following conversation, which covers many more topics than the one we excerpted below, took place at Gregory’s home in California (the two did not live together) and was as lively as one can imagine. The exchange below is especially interesting to us, and it is by reflecting about its implications that we want to end our piece.

Bateson: By the way, I don’t like cameras on tripods, just grinding. In the latter part of the schizophrenic project, we had cameras on tripods just grinding.

Mead: And you don’t like that?

Bateson: Disastrous.

Mead: Why?

Bateson: Because I think the photographic record should be an art form.

Mead: Oh why? Why shouldn’t you have some records that aren’t art forms? Because if it’s an art form, it has been altered.

Bateson: It’s undoubtedly been altered. I don’t think it exists unaltered.

Mead: I think it’s very important, if you’re going to be scientific about behavior, to give other people access to the material, as comparable as possible to the access you had. You don’t, then, alter the material. There’s a bunch of film makers now that are saying, ‘It should be art,’ and wrecking everything that we’re trying to do. Why the hell should it be art?

Bateson: Well, it should be off the tripod.

Mead: So you run around.

Bateson: Yes (Bateson, Mead, and Brand, 1976, PDF page 20).

After the two of us managed to stop chuckling at this marital exchange, we thought we'd make Mead happy, posthumously, by publishing the photograph below, which was taken... right off our tripod! It is a photo snapped from the shoulder of highway A82, just south of Glencoe Mountain. Those of you who have taken the time to watch our video will immediately recognize the landscape from the final sequence of that short documentary. However, it looks much different there and here is why.

Insert photo 2 about here

Caption: File 019A4866.CR2

A time lapse showing the drifts of clouds and fog over a distant mountains would connote—we felt when editing our video—the idea that weather keeps moving, *ad infinitum*, even when people's stories end and their legs find a moment of stillness. The time lapse was shot over a period of 20 minutes, with photos snapped from the tripod at intervals of 5 seconds. The total count was 240 pictures, shown at 24 frames per second for a final total of ten seconds of video. Though the camera was on the tripod, it was not just left there "grinding." With Murphy's Law in mind, the camera was turned off not exactly at 20 minutes, but rather strategically 30 seconds later. Having a few extra photos to choose from would come in handy should the need to discard a few of them arise.

The need did arise.

Because the highway stood between the camera and the distant mountain (there was nowhere ideal to set up a tripod on the other side of the road), the rooftop of the taller vehicles driving on the road would show in the frame—as it became clear from a couple of test shots. This was no real problem, however since in framing the composition of the photos Phillip had taken into account the cropping factor we desired for the final video output. No cars, not even tall SUVs, would make it past the bottom screen letterbox. Camper van roofs on the other hand, as it turned out, were tall enough to show. Fortunately the shutter only caught one of those—as seen in photo "file 019A4866.CR2" above—and that photo was quickly tossed in the discard bin. But what was the significance of this deletion?

With Bateson, we believe that the photographic and cinematographic records of our fieldwork are, inevitably, art forms. Art is creativity. Art is generative. Our time lapse was not meant to generate an argument about highways and camper vans, and so it was an easy decision to throw away that photo. And beyond that, the photos taken that morning were subject to an extensive creative process of post-processing during which contrast, brightness, color tone and saturation were manipulated to create a desired impression. Furthermore, time lapse photography has no sound, so the sound of wind was added later on during video editing. But not quite the sound of real wind—real recorded wind sounds are, well, "disastrous"—so we added instead a track of digital sound meant to resemble wind. All of this was done to *create*. Not to lie, but rather—in an artistic sense—to *create* an impression.

“Altering” images is not unique. Ethnography students are taught in their very first year to go out on the field and record everything, or nearly everything, and later on to filter out content that is deemed peripheral to their descriptions and arguments. Nobody would understand anything about a fieldwork project if unimportant, uninteresting, irrelevant information weren’t filtered out. Nobody would appreciate a thick description or an insightful argument if the right words—the words that feel and sound good—weren’t chosen by a writer. Editing and showing the images and sound one has collected is just like “writing up” and publishing field notes. Not editing, and not showing one’s edited work, are thus missed opportunities to create impressions.

Ethnographic description and interpretation are creative acts. Their wholeness and consistency is an illusion of order imposed over a chaotic world: a creative sleight of hand not at all different from the illusion of movement created by playing back still photographs, and not at all different from the illusion of an impression generated by discarded what doesn’t belong, aesthetically and logically, to that impression. Lately we have come to call this attitude “non-representational”—but pace Mead’s argument above—faithful representation has never quite existed. Even a tripod has to be placed somewhere, and that choice is inevitably a creative one—just like running around with a camera is.

In the end, the publishing of picture “file 019A4866.CR2”—whose addition to this chapter will hopefully serve the purpose of editorial consistency—will not result in stilling or freezing our cinematic creation. It will not silence the wind that was present when it was snapped. It will not interrupt the continuity of filmic impression. It will do none of those things because it never was, and never will be, part of our video. It is nothing but an omission, an aberration of movement, an unintended impression, a reminder of our strategic alteration of the field, a memory filtered out of our edited evocation, a failure, a “disaster” brought about by a camera left there immobile, just “grinding.”

References

Bateson, Gregory, Margaret Mead, and Steven Brand. 1976. “For God’s Sake, Margaret.” *CoEvolutionary Quarterly*, 10: 32-44.

Also available at: <http://www.alice.id.tue.nl/references/bateson-mead-1976.pdf>

Büscher, Monika, John Urry, and Katian Witchger. 2010. *Mobile Methods*. London: Routledge.

Careri, Francesco. 2009. *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili

Carpiano, Richard. 2009. “Come Take a Walk with Me: the Go-Along Interview as a Novel Method for Studying the Implications of Place for Health and Well-Being.” *Health & Place* 15: 263-272.

Edensor, Tim. 2010. “Walking in Rhythms: Place, Regulation, Style, and the Flow of Experience.” *Visual Studies* 25: 69-79.

Enjalran, Muriel. 2015. “The Value of Experience”. *Canto di Strata, Nero*: pp. 17-23.

Evans, David. 2012. *The Art of Walking: A Field Guide*. London: Black Dog Publishing.

- Evans, James and Phil Jones. 2011. "The Walking Interview: Methodology, Mobility, and Place." *Applied Geography* 31: 849-858.
- Feld, Stephen and Keith Basso. 1996. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.
- Garcia, Carolyn, Marla Eisenberg, Ellen Frerich, Kate Lechner, and Katherine Lust. 2012. "Conducting Go-Along Interviews to Understand Context and Promote Health." *Qualitative Health Research* 22: 1395-1403.
- Gros, Frederic. 2014. *A Philosophy of Walking*. London: Verso.
- Ingold, Tim. 2005. "The Eye of the Storm: Visual Perception and the Weather." *Visual Studies* 20: 97-104.
- Jones, Phil, Griff Bunce, James Evans, Hannah Gibbs, and Jane Ricketts Hein. 2008. "Exploring Space and Place with Walking Interviews." *Journal of Research Practice* 4: 1-9.
- Lorimer, Hayden and Katrin Lund. 2008. "A Collectable Topography: Walking, Remembering, and Recording Mountains." In *Ways of Walking*, edited by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, 185-199. Farnham: Ashgate.
- MacFarlane, Robert. 2008. *The Wild Places*. London: Penguin.
- MacFarlane, Robert. 2009. *Mountains of the Mind*. New York: Vintage.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1974. *Gay Science*. Toronto, ON: Random House
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1889. *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize With a Hammer*. Leipzig, Germany: Verlag von C. G. Naumann.
- O'Rourke, Karen. 2013. *Walking and Mapping: Artist as Cartographers*. London: MIT Press.
- Pink, Sarah. 2007. "Walking with Video." *Visual Studies* 22: 240-252.
- Pink, Sarah. 2008a. "Mobilising Visual Ethnography: Making Routes, Making Place, and Making Images." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9: 1-18.
- Pink, Sarah. 2008b. "An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making." *Ethnography* 9: 175-196.

Richardson, Tina. 2015. *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sooke, A. (2012). Hamish Fulton wanders the neural pathways. *Telegraph*
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/9014354/Hamish-Fulton-wanders-the-neural-pathways.html>

Sharr, Adam. 2007. *Heidegger for Architects*. London: Routledge

Smith, Phil. 2013. "Walking-Based Arts: A Resource for the Guided Tour?" *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 13: 103–114.

Schneider, Carrie Marie. 2013. "The Ten List: Walk as Art," *Glass Tire: Texas Visual Art*,
<http://glasstire.com/2012/11/23/the-ten-list-walk-as-art/>

Truman, Sarah E. & Springgay, Stephanie. 2016. Propositions for Walking Research. In *Routledge Handbook of Intercultural Research*, edited by Pamela Burnard, Elizabeth Mackinlay & Kimberly Powell, 259-267. New York: Routledge.

Vannini, Phillip and April Vannini. 2016. *Wilderness*. London: Routledge.

Vergunst, Jo Lee. 2008. Taking a Trip and Taking Care in Everyday Life. In *Ways of Walking*, edited by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, 105-121. Farnham: Ashgate.

Wark, McKenzie. 2011. *The Beach Beneath the Streets. The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*. London: Verso.

Wilson, A. (2002). 'The blue mountains are constantly walking' - On the art of Hamish Fulton. In Tufnell, B. & Wilson, A. *Hamish Fulton - walking journey* (pp.20-31). London, UK: Tate Publishing, Tate Gallery.

Witmore, Christopher. 2004. "Four Archaeological Engagements with Place Mediating Bodily Experience through Peripatetic Video." *Visual Anthropology Review* 20: 57-71.

Yi'En, Cheng. 2014. "Telling Stories of the City: Walking Ethnography, Affective Materialities, and Mobile Encounters." *Space & Culture* 17: 211-223.

Phillip Vannini is a Professor in the School of Communication & Culture at Royal Roads University and Canada Research Chair in Public Ethnography. Phillip is a transdisciplinary and multimodal ethnographer who studies subjects as diverse as nature-cultures, mobilities, assemblages and the social aspects of human embodiment. Vannini's research interests broadly include material culture, technology and

culture, sensory studies and cultural geographies. He is the author/editor of thirteen books, including the recent *Non-Representational Methodologies* (Routledge, 2015) and *Off the Grid* (Routledge, 2014).

April Vannini is an educator and researcher teaching in the School of Communication & Culture at Royal Roads University. Her research interests are diverse and interdisciplinary but primarily focus on critical communication studies, contemporary cultural studies, and cultural theory and philosophy. Her current interest is in architecture, space/place, wilderness, and research-creation as practice. Together with Phillip Vannini she is the author of *Wilderness* (Routledge, 2016), published as part of the Routledge series on Key Ideas in Geography.