

Mobile heritage

**Walking and the environment through future and
historical
Perspectives**

September 16-19, 2024, in Hanaholmen, Finland

Conference Proceedings, edited by Simon Poole, Dani Schrire & Daniele Valisena



One^{by}
Walking



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Welcome Address to the Conference delegates

Si Poole, University of Chester; Visiting Professor, University of Gothenburg.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and fellow advocates of heritage and movement,

It is my great honour to welcome you to the “One by Walking” conference, where we gather to explore the profound connection between walking, cultural heritage, and the environment from both historical and future perspectives. We are here today to engage in thoughtful discussions on the enduring importance of walking in shaping our past, present, and future—and how this simple, yet fundamental, human practice can inform sustainable solutions for the challenges we face.

This conference is built around five central themes, each opening new windows of insight into how walking threads through history, culture, environment, and society.

Our first theme, “Historical and Future Perspectives on Walking Cultural Heritage”, will explore the rich heritage of walking routes, not just as a means of physical movement but as pathways of cultural exchange. From Nordic pilgrimages that connect regions by sea and land, to the evolving patterns of walking in modern life, we will examine how old traditions can intersect with new ideas. These conversations invite us to reflect on how walking can continue to bridge communities and shape our shared future.

In “Walking in Landscapes 'At-Risk'”, we turn our focus to the fragile balance between cultural heritage and environmental sustainability. As walking becomes a vital tool in promoting sustainable tourism, it is also being challenged by industrial expansion and environmental degradation. This theme invites us to confront difficult questions about land use, rural gentrification, and the ongoing tension between access to nature and the forces threatening it. It is a timely reflection on how walking can both highlight and address the environmental crises reshaping our landscapes.

Our third theme, “Social and Political Perspectives on Walking Practices”, brings attention to the role of walking in activism and heritage. Walking is not only a personal or leisurely pursuit, but a means of social and political expression. Through artistic interventions and local activism, we will consider how walking can foster connection, challenge inequalities, and drive cultural change, both locally and globally.

The fourth theme, “Future Visions of Sensitive Landscapes and Walking Cultures”, will guide us into the imagined futures of our relationship with the land. Here, we will explore alternative ways of thinking about walking—from multi-species perspectives to non-anthropocentric worldviews—and consider how walking can help us reimagine our ties to the earth, particularly in sensitive landscapes. As we examine movement heritage, we will see how walking infrastructures, from Ostrobothnia to Trondheim, are already transforming our understanding of nature and cultural tourism.

Finally, we arrive at “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Movement and Walking Heritage”. This theme will deepen our understanding of walking as a subject of study, from the development of new theoretical frameworks to critical analyses of sustainable tourism. We will also explore the narratives that surround walking, in literature, film, and other media, and how they shape our collective sense of movement heritage. Through these lenses, we aim to expand the ways in which we can study, preserve, and transform our relationship with walking and its broader cultural significance.

As we embark on this journey together, I encourage you to think deeply about how walking—as a heritage, a practice, and a connection to our environment—can inform the pathways we build for future generations. Let this conference be a call to action, a place where we not only reflect on the past and present but also envision the possibilities of walking toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and connected world.

Thank you for being here, and I look forward to the enriching discussions that lie ahead. Together, let us take the first steps on this important journey.

Pilgrimage to the Spiritual Wilderness: A Trekking in No Man's Land in Tibetan Plateau

Yue Hu, University of Plymouth

Geographically, Tibetan Plateau includes several countries including China. Tibetan people consider the plateau as the centre of the world as well as the top of the world, both geographically and religiously. Mount Kailash (6638m) is one of the auspicious sites worshipped by the Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Bons (Chakrabarty & Sadhukhan, 2020). Kailash has been respected as a spiritual antithesis whose spiritual height is even higher than Mount Everest. He¹ is called “a glistening and lofty snow mountain rising into the sky like a king upon his throne” (Mathieu, 2023, 41). Therefore, it is a ritual to do a circular worship around him. Pious Tibetans increase their level of religious commitment by repeatedly kneeling, prostrating on the ground and standing up again. This ritual could take several weeks instead of a few days. The physically demanding Buddhist practice was disagreed for the extensively intensified physical contact with the divine ground (Huber, 1999).

This paper is a storytelling that uses creative writing and visual illustrations to restore my 60-kilometre circumambulation trekking

around Mount Kailash of the Himalaya Mountain range in Tibet, China. The selected trekking diary concludes with reflections and discussions on geopoetics, ‘Humanscape’, and representation of the pilgrimage walking.

Foreword

My three-month residency in Tibetan No-Man’s Land starts from the river source of the Yangtze River and ends at the border between China, India, and Nepal. On the 5th of July 2022, my 29th lunar birthday, I spent more than 17 hours, walking nearly 60 kilometres with about 1000 metres ascending to 5645 metres to meet Mount Kailash.

Selected Diary Excerpts

2:33 am

It's 2 am now and I barely slept the last night. I can see the galaxy arch and many more stars than it should be, as I was so sleepy, dizzy, even hallucinating. I was accompanied by a Tibetan young man. He dropped out of middle school by his parents to raise his siblings by herding yaks and sheep. I followed him step by step, stone by stone, regardless of social distance² as I couldn't see any roads ahead, visually and mentally. Can you imagine how dark it is- if you put your palm in front of your eyes, you can't see any fingers. I didn't even manage to hold my phone still for 2 seconds of exposure thanks to my scariness and coldness. In the first two

¹ There are different genders to describe Mount Kailash from religious, culture, geography, and humanity.

² It was under China’s extremely strict Covid-19 isolation policy.

hours, my mood intertwined and entangled- excited, nervous, fearful, sleepy, respectful with imagination, expectation, and scrupulosity- all the adjectives popped out.



(Photographs by Yue Hu unless noted separately)

4:51 am

As the daylight came, my fear gradually faded while I was still concerned about oxygen and my stamina. I started to see other pilgrims. I was told that every pilgrim with Tibetan Buddhism belief must go to this worship circumambulation at least once in their life. Mount Kailash is the symbol of the highest spirit of the Buddha. The pilgrims wish to bless themselves and their family and loved ones by this worship. Pious pilgrims worship the mountain by walking and bending to show their highest respect to nature and to their Buddhist belief. They believe that if you finish one circular worship, all your misdeeds and sins could be washed out and forgiven. The more you finish, the closer you get to the Buddhist enlightenment.



8:27 am

As I circle the mountain, the sides and face of the mountain reveal gradually. Does anyone have this similar experience of looking at a tremendous snow mountain? I stand at a lower position, looking up and forward to the mountain. As it is extremely high and massive, it feels like leaning down towards my face, and we are staring at each other now. When I look at the snow peak straightly on its face, I catch eye contact with him which touches me and makes me tearful for his solid, pure and scared spirit... I think about time flows, the texture curved by wind and stone, the power of the mountain and how much religious meaning it contains and everything, but also nothing. It solely stands still and roots eternally in the centre of the world, overlooking the Earth. I can never tell how touched and overwhelming it feels as I get closer to see his face. He is a pin, pinpointing the earth and the softness of the world.



12:16 pm

Now I'm in the second last crest I have to climb although I have already tired out. I still have to use both my hands and feet, and it's the most dangerous bouldering. My warm guide always wants to open a conversation to distract my exhaustion. I always try to speak less to preserve my oxygen level which sounds a bit rude. No, I'm joking! As he doesn't speak much Chinese Mandarin, I tried many ways to translate my words into an easier version.

Him: What do you do (for living³)?

Me: I'm a student.

Him: Where do you study?

Me: In the UK...

He: What (not 'where') is the UK?

³ He meant where does my living expense come from.

Me: It's a country very far from us, where people don't speak Tibetan or Chinese Mandarin. And they look different from us! We both laughed. Successful distraction.



(Photograph by my guide)

1:19 pm

I had nothing to say when I reached the highest point- Drölma Pass (5645m). There is too much and too little to say. I want to cry.



7:40 pm

The excitement and climax moment has gone. I already think of giving up a hundred times. I keep asking my guide how far we are from the starting point, I stop every kilometre, breathing loudly. I was frustrated when I saw endless zigzag paths up and down. I feel useless when other pilgrims are quicker than me even with scrupulous prostration. I have no choice but to finish before the sunset as we have already missed the last campsite. My feet swell and I'm sure I have blisters on my feet as I feel hurt.



7:55 pm

I felt peaceful, relieved and a bit moved when I saw layers of coloured flags surround a signpost with the background of snow-white peaks and clouds shrouding the mountain. Among the brutal and harsh

environment, these coloured flags who accompanied my whole journey are outstanding. They are prayer flags. There is a beautiful metaphor- when they are blown by the wind, it is believed that the wind or Nature read the prayer texts on the flags loudly and spread good will to every corner day and night relentlessly. It's one of the embodiments of the Buddhist spirit.

Similar to the coloured prayer flags, the stone is another carrier of Tibetan wishes. Piled stones or pebbles inscribed with mantras are called Mani Wall. They are placed along the roadsides and rivers, normally grouped together as an offering of spirits of specific sites. Here it encourages travellers by generating power and energy. And the process of curving the stone is also a process of self-meditation and devotion to Buddhism.



(Photograph by my guide)

8:42 pm

Finally, we arrived at flattened terrains, most importantly, I saw villages, it is the town where we started in the dark! The villages cuddled by the grassland look lovely. This is the first time that I am longing for human

presence so much. With the sunset, the decent toilet, and the rainbow (yes, we were caught up by many showers and hails and wet and dry all day). I can't feel my lower body, both my mind and body are floating in the air. It's the end of trekking and the beginning of a new day, new reflection, new culture and life for me.



Afterword

The sacred wilderness and solid Tibetan Buddhism beliefs support me and lead me. Immersing myself in heavenly beautiful landscapes and physically demanding conditions, I communicate with every creature and myself. I see others' life reflected deeply in my life. All my life was flashing back like a celluloid film, I recall the days in Tibet in wildlife protection, the desire to escape from skyscrapers, the uncertainty and restriction of my life. I can clearly hear

and feel my breath pace; I generate energy and encouragement by touching the stones and refresh myself by touching the freezing water. Every sense is enlarged through this enormous walk. I was inscribed by the sunshine, the hail, the smell of yak shit, and blisters. I also inevitably intervened in Tibetan cultural and natural landscapes as a non-religious. I'm not a researcher but a walker, or, an invader.

"I see nothing but my whole life."

Embodied "Earth writing" in 'Humanscape'

Rebecca Solnit (2007) describes walking as a state in which the mind, body, and world align together to create a conversation where landscapes stimulate thoughts and emotions. During the walk, the rhythm of walking generates the momentum of thinking, and the passage through a landscape stimulates thoughts which creates a consonance between internal and external communications. Thus, the mind is also a landscape composed of thoughts, and walking is one way to traverse it (Solnit, 2007, 6). This interaction between the individual and the surroundings transforms walking into a spontaneous and even creative act, echoing the environment's textures and stories. Tibetan pilgrimage to Mount Kailash resonates with Solnit's ideas, in which walking transcends the inner physical to a certain rhythm as a flow and becomes a ritual of devotion, meditation, and spiritual connection. Pilgrims use their flesh to engage with the land through

circumambulations, digging their contact with the earth even the dust floating in the air. They “kiss the land” with their bodies. Each movement merges the physical effort of trekking with the spiritual act of connecting to the sacred.

This echoes the embodied “earth writing” from geopoetics, which redefines landscapes as dynamic, interconnected entities shaped by human imagination and natural forces (White, 2003). The notion of geopoetics, brought up by Kenneth White, explores the relationship between humans and the Earth beyond conventional geography and poetry framework, emphasising physical, emotional, and intellectual connections within the world/land. It invites a holistic openness to explore landscapes where the boundaries between the human and non-human dissolve and blurred. As one of the central practices in geopoetics, walking is not merely a physical act, but an embodied dialogue with the Earth that invites participants to engage with margins, boundaries, and the rhythms of nature (Magrane et al., 2020).

Under the potential Anthropocene (2002), which highlights the profound influence of human activities on geology, climate, and ecosystems, landscapes, once perceived as natural and untouched, now bear the marks of human interventions. The new term ‘Humanscape’ originates from this contextual transformation, signifying spaces where human agencies have reshaped the

land to make it habitable or functional both tangibly, culturally, and spiritually. This concept is inspired by Dan Smyer Yü, who brought up ‘mindscape’ based on his research and practice in Tibet as a local researcher. On one hand, ‘Humanscape’ shares similarities with ‘mindscape’ as they both stem from human experiences in the external environment (Yü, 2015). They mirror the physical landscape and involve the practice carried onsite and sense the places. While ‘mindscape’ could be seen as an internalised landscape from religious and humanity’s perspective (2015), ‘Humanscape’ emphasises the physical formation and texture of the landscape, which, on the contrary, is the externalisation of the landscape.

While ‘Humanscape’ is not a mature conceptual framework yet, I aim to narrow down its definition via my walking practice in Asia and Europe. The journey starts from Tibet where it ignites different explanations of the term. From the suffix “-scape,” which refers to vast terrains visible to unaided eyes, ‘Humanscape’ aims to reflect humanity’s ambitious reimagining and expectation of nature. It can refer to both the physical landscapes altered by human intervention and the internal landscapes of human experience, knowledge, and reflections. From a smaller scale, ‘Humanscape’ could also be used to refer to human bodies- skin, complexion, and appearance of the figure. Different scales of ‘Humanscape’ compose a metaphor which indicates both internal and external

connections between the human body and the landscape as open organisms, in which the topographic texture and physiognomy could be compared. The duality aligns with the Chinese philosophical belief of “Unity of Heaven and Humanity” (Yao et al., 2000), which suggests spiritual and physical integration between humans and nature.

In Mt Kailash, ‘Humanscape’ could be seen as new habitable lands created on the freezing tundra by the nomads, scattered coloured flags and Mani stones which pinpoint human’s presence in nature, human-centred perspective of seeing and composing landscape, the topographic skin of the land... The journey to Mount Kailash involves not only physical exertion but also sensory and emotional engagement. The sunlight, weather, and physical challenges illustrate how landscapes influence the mind and body. O. F. Bollnow argues that wandering could be purposeless until you become a part of the landscape (2011). Walking is being “broken down” mentally and physically with the desire to “flow inside a rhythm of walking” - to experience a temporary state of euphoria, a blending of mind with the outside world of nature (2011, 27). By contacting with the land, one seeks to be intertwined with nature, and the nature of a walk cannot be predetermined. Thus, the fascination of wander exists in embracing unpredictable potentials and new possibilities rather than a designed result. The unpredictability of walking, with its embrace of new potentials also speaks to the geopoetic exploration. The interplay of the

sacred mountain’s towering presence and the harsh environmental conditions creates a sense of humility and respect for the sublime for the walkers in this specific scene. Thus, landscapes are not submissive backdrops but active partakers that contribute to the experience and knowledge; humans are the creator, agency, and constituent of the ‘Humanscape’.

Representation of the Spiritual Wilderness

In his pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash, Lama Govinda (2005) recalled that the mountains attract and collect invisible energies from the forces of the air, water, electricity and magnetism and create winds, thunderstorms, rains, and waterfalls. He regards this as the “greatness of mighty mountains” (2005, 272) which personalises the mountain with bold characteristics. In *The Fate of Place*, Edward Casey (1997, 90) writes that “[...]place has its own being.”. Attracted by these poetic personalisations, I wonder how to represent the form of being of Mt Kailash. Then walking becomes a practical means of movement to my creative and reflective practice. I tried to use creative methods- storytelling, image illustration, video documentary, and body movement- to restore the pilgrimage experience in the presentation at the conference. This is an experiment that questions how artistic practices can extend geopoetics by transforming encountered ‘Humanscape’ into visual and textual expressions. The observations (rather than results) come as follows:

Carriers and Images of the Spirit

The sacred images and mantra of cultural artefacts serve as carriers of spirit, as they could be seen from Catholicism to Buddhism. These objects are imbued with significance, connecting pilgrims to the divine and offering protection beyond the pilgrimage itself. Jérémie Koering, in *Iconophages: A History of Ingesting Images*, discusses the desire to touch, kiss, or even digest and ingest art as a yearning to internalise their spiritual power. This representation of the holy spirit reflects the deep human desire to embody the sacred, merging the physical and metaphysical realms. The hope of seeing the holy grace of an image incites the pilgrims to cross mountains to see, touch, and commune with the venerable image. (Koering, 2020, pp. 87-88) While in China, as people normally don't take photographs of nor directly reproduce saints or Buddha, the grace of the sacred mountain draws people there. The prayer flags and mani stones encountered during the pilgrimage exemplify how cultural artefacts become part of the landscape, carrying spiritual and emotional meanings.

These handcrafts, inscribed with wishes and mantras, are integral to the spiritual landscape, transforming it into a dynamic entity permeated with human hopes and reverence. The fluttering flags spread blessings through the wind, while the engraved mani stones symbolise devotional offerings and spiritual energy, bridging cultural expression to the natural world.

Artistic and textual representations of these sacred artefacts invite engagement, turning walkers into a portion of the spiritual wilderness. The iconography traditionally associated with Mount Kailash functions as a mechanism of connection, inspiring pilgrims to interact deeply with these sacred spaces (Koering, 2024). Such representations highlight the role of cultural artefacts in making the intangible aspects of spirituality tangible within the 'Humanscape'.

Aesthetical Sublime and (in)accessibility

In Chinese, the 'sublime' could be translated into 'big or grand' in photography which indicates its acquiescently large scale and distance from the audience. However, this emphasis can sometimes overwhelm viewers, creating a sense of detachment rather than engagement. Large-scale representations often struggle to bridge the emotional gap, presenting landscapes as too distant or unapproachable. If one searches the (propaganda) image of Tibet or Mt Kailash, none of the landscapes seems approachable, which, paradoxically, intrigue visitors (me) to reveal the sacred beauty or to see how 'big' it is.

The aesthetics of distance intertwine with the challenges of accessibility. The tendency to create a significant distance between the viewer and the subject raises questions about the nature of representation and the accessibility of depicted reality. How to address ethical and aesthetic challenges and make images function in a way that is not just a beautification of subjects, but also

serves as powerful tool for reflection and engagement, is one of the core questions of the artistic walking practice. The construction of roads, bridges, and tunnels to make landscapes physically more accessible, can be considered an invasion of wilderness, but it also introduces new forms of restriction. In *New Topographics*, Robert Adams describes this scene as an “absent presence,” where human traces disrupt the pristine wilderness but fail to offer meaningful engagement (Highnam, 1981, 6). It was an accomplishment to get through and leave some evident traces on the supposedly virginal land. The marks of human activity within vast, often desolate spaces, suggest a new form of the sublime where nature and human intrusion coexist. The ways to get *into* the sites are rather forms of controlled restrictions held by authorities and individuals to implement their political agenda, to build infrastructure and housing, to propel propaganda, or to enclose land. The accumulated humans’ imposition on the land manifests themselves where the only true wild places are those that society has deemed as ‘natural wilderness’. Therefore, the concern of accessibility still exists from new angles. The obstacle is both physical and intangible, which contributes to the mysterious remoteness of Mt Kailash. Thus, the human-centric view should be admitted rather than avoided by beautifying pure nature. This paradox shifts the way to approach the landscape and related problems, especially in the contested Tibet. Tibetan pilgrimage which deals with stamina, extreme altitudes, and logistical

challenges demonstrates that accessibility is not merely about convenience but about forging meaningful engagement beyond the scene.

Writing as Storytelling

Written accounts of the unique individual pilgrimage experiences play a crucial role in preserving and restoring the essence of both natural and spiritual landscapes. Pilgrim diaries, such as those by Khatag Zamyak, provide insights into the interplay of the landscape and self-reflection, even enlightenment. With the aim of seeking ‘karma’, he was on pilgrimage at Mount Kailash. Zamyak’s accounts of his visionary experiences at Mount Kailash illustrate how the act of writing can make abstract concepts visible and accumulate the momentum to achieve new understandings of ‘karma’. From this, he also linked personal narratives to broader ethical and spiritual traditions. His practice of interpreting the landscape in terms of his own karma is a practice that is facilitated by various pilgrimage tradition which facilitates this storytelling. As pilgrims engage with the sacred landscape, they interpret their experiences through the lens of karma, weaving narratives that reflect their spiritual journeys (Hartmann, 2023). These writings serve not only as personal reflections but also as a means of documenting the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of the wilderness.

Personal reflective writings contribute to the challenges of capturing the ineffable nature

of spiritual landscapes. The act of writing becomes an attempt to restore experiences that are often fleeting and intangible. The smell of yak dung, the sensation of blisters, and the consoling experience of bathing in the wind are elements that cannot be fully highlighted or conveyed via visual (and written) media. The representation and restoration of the spiritual wilderness require a delicate balance between accessibility, aesthetics, and authenticity. And it is still in doubt if they can be narrated and resorted through the walking diary. While these fleeting moments can be partially conveyed through storytelling, they ultimately underscore the importance of direct, embodied engagement with the wilderness. Embracing its dynamic interchange of human presence and natural beauty allows people to cultivate appreciation and understanding.

“Tibet is an imagination, and it generates imagination itself.”

–Dan Smyer Yü

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Movement heritage: Paths as links between history and a sustainable future

Katarina Saltzman, University of Gothenburg, and Daniel Svensson, Malmö University

Footpaths and walking trails are formed over time by human bodies and minds in motion, individually and collectively. A path evidently connects us, here and now, with those who walked before us and those who might follow our footsteps. So, what happens if we approach walking paths and other subtle traces of human movements in the landscape as heritage? In several projects over the last decade, we have explored pathways as a form of heritage (Svensson, Salzmänn, & Sörlin 2022; 2021). Paths are dependent on continuous use and/or memory work to remain, and they point to historical and current forms of land use that are sustainable in the most basic meaning of the word. They have a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension, leading from one point to another on the ground, while at the same time also being connected to the past, to previous uses and users. Paths are essential, omnipresent, yet ephemeral, and rarely articulated as parts of common heritage, as if their passing horizontal properties have made them less useful material for conventional heritagization. In this talk, we will explore the potential roles of paths as links between history and a sustainable future.

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individually and collectively. A path evidently connects us, here and now, with those who walked before us and those who might follow our footsteps. So, what happens if we approach walking paths and other subtle traces of human movements in the landscape as heritage? In several projects over the last decade, we have together with Sverker Sörlin explored pathways as a form of heritage. Paths are dependent on continuous use and/or memory work to remain, and they point to historical and current forms of land use that are sustainable in the most basic meaning of the word. They have a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension, leading from one point to another on the ground, while at the same time they are also connected to the past, to previous uses and users. Paths are essential, omnipresent, yet ephemeral, and rarely articulated as parts of a common heritage, as if their passing horizontal properties have made them less useful material for conventional heritagization. The purpose of this discussion is to explore the potential roles of paths as links between history and a sustainable future.

Our research has taken us to many different landscapes over the years, and all of them have been rich in traces of human mobility on foot. One example is the Finn Forest Trail in Sweden and Norway, a trail that is linking traditional heritage sites with movement across the Swedish/Norwegian border. The area is deeply affected by the Forest Finns who settled in these forests from the 1500s onwards. Traces of 500-year-old trails in the vast forests without roads tell the histories of a life dependent on walking, for hunting, gathering, fishing, forestry, church visits, schooling, etcetera. Finn Forest culture cannot be understood without paths, as indicated by Carl Axel Gottlund (1796-1875), the scholar who wrote the diary *Dagbok över mina vandringar på Wermlands och Solörs finnskogar*

in 1821. The Finn Forest Trail is an example of how old paths can be articulated into a hiking trail and be used for several purposes such as attracting tourists, furthering regional cross-border cooperation and entrepreneurship, furthering outdoor recreation and strengthening local identity (Svensson, Sörlin & Saltzman, 2021).

Vålådalen in the Scandinavian mountains is another place where paths have played a part in shaping and understanding the landscape. It has also been a place where athletes have come to train according to the ideas of the coach Gösta Olander. He believed in using the existing landscape as it is rather than altering it for better performance. In his own words: “Our Lord has through a grand and varied nature given us the best training ground”. (Olander, 1948).

If we broaden our scope to include not only outdoor recreation and walking but also sport, we see that sportification has changed the impact of sports on the land. Paths used to be an important infrastructure of training in sports such as running, orienteering and skiing. Now they are to some extent replaced by indoor facilities and test labs. The twentieth century has meant a shift from natural to rational training. From organically emerging paths where people trained, to specially designed trails based on physiological research. This is part of a rationalization of sport, and society in general.

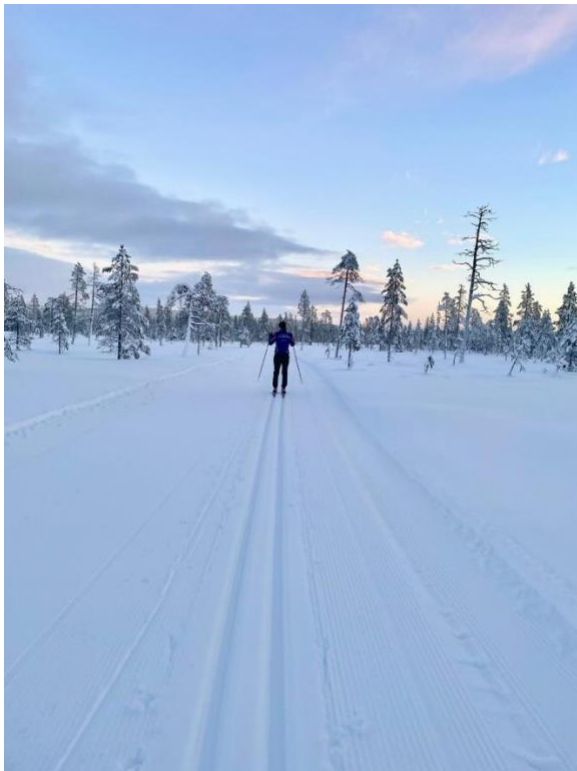
Paths can be tools for, and results of, contextual sport. We know that historically, many sports emerged from specific geographical contexts. Skiing where there is snow, surfing where there are waves, skating where there are frozen lakes (Brian Wilson & Brad Millington, 2020). Postmodern sports are more decontextualized, and they depend on indoor arenas, virtual training options, etcetera. But paths still have

practical and emotional qualities. Can we use them to recontextualize sports and training?

A key concept in our research is the concept of movement heritage. Conventionally, a "heritage path" is a path connecting "heritage sites". Signposts tell you where to stop and what to look at. What to regard as heritage is typically defined by authorized heritage experts (Smith,, 2006). We have argued that paths and trails not only are ways to reach sites of heritage – such as buildings, or monuments – but that they are also heritage in and of themselves. Paths and trails are important if we want to understand the roles of mobility and physical presence in different landscapes over time. These significant but small-scale imprints form a distinct kind of cultural heritage that is dependent on continuous use or memory work to remain. They transcend the nature/culture divide, as well as the categories of tangible and intangible. They can tell the stories of those who walked before us, as Lars Gustafsson has highlighted in his poem “Ballad on the Paths in Västmanland” where he asks “Who made the path?” and mentions hunters, timid outlaws and women collecting firewood. The poem continues: “All and none of them. We make it together [...] We write the paths, and the paths remain, and the paths are wiser than we are, and know all we wanted to know”.



How often do you need to walk a path for it to remain? It depends, for example, on: In what kind of terrain, climate and vegetation is it located? How is the surrounding land maintained? Are there others, humans or non-humans, using the path? And what does it mean for a path to “remain”? Is it the physical path on the ground, or the histories and memories connected to it, that we want to preserve? While hard to detect on the ground, the path could still be imprinted in memories. It might also be documented, for example in maps and photographs. Based on such memories, it can still be possible to rediscover and start walking an old path again.



The classic philosophical question of the Theseus ship could perhaps be applied also to paths. When does a path cease to exist? How can we think about the relations between material and

immaterial paths? We have here discussed what it would mean to consider paths and trails as heritage, as profound aspects of being human. To some extent a path remains as long as someone keeps memories of it. They are indeed constantly being made and remade through collective decisions and actions, by everyday maintenance, care and repair, and not least, by being walked upon.

Paths can be understood and “read” as articulations of purposes and values just as much as they are obviously the result of the practice of walking. Their becoming is both material and discursive. The long history of many paths is in itself a testament to the potential of walking as part of a sustainable landscape use. The imprints that we make on the ground, in the air, and in the water, have grown to the magnitude where a concept like the Anthropocene is needed to explain our role. Paths and trails highlight the fact that we have been here for a while, and that we have the potential to use the landscape without destroying it.

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Infrastructure of Violence

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Abstract

In the last five years, a group of interdisciplinary researchers working together in the program Heritage on the Margins and the project Route Biographies at ZRC SAZU (Ljubljana), performed a series of walking-writing experiments in which we discussed (individually and as a group) different research topics related to specific researchers' expertise. We followed various thematic pathways such as historic mobile practices, physical space as a personal biography, borders, walking with the river, infrastructure of violence and more. We also experimented with ethnographic writing and other forms of ethnographic presentations such as video essays, anthropoetry, etc. The following video poem is one such example.

The poem results from the workshop Infrastructure of Violence organised by Manca Bajec (Goldsmith University London), held in ex-detention camp, the present San Sabba Rice Mill National Monument and Museum (*Civico Museo della Risiera di San Sabba e Monumento Nazionale / Državni spomenik in muzej Rižarna Sv. Sobote*) in Trieste, in May 2024. The poem was also inspired by the novel *Blameless* (orig. *Non luogo a procedere*), by Claudio Magris (2015), a book about the construction of the museum and the complicated history of the frontier city Trieste, the trials for mass murders after the Second World War, and the general human cruelty.

The method of thinking about the infrastructure of violence through sound and “soundscape of

violence” was presented to the participants, and the material for the workshop was given a day before the walking seminar. We read Pauline Oliveros (2005) distinction between hearing (“something that happens to us because we have ears”) and listening (“something we develop and cultivate our whole life”), as well as about the possibilities of “counter-listening”, i.e. “listening against official narratives” (Ouzounian, 2023). As Manca explained on the spot, “Here, this building, this infrastructure is asking us to listen”.

Following Manca's guidelines, I tried to listen to the infrastructure of violence, hearing beyond the noises of the visitors and traffic. The entry point and prompt that triggered the transition from hearing to listening was the fluttering of the pigeons in the warehouse, so-called Crosses Room (*Sala delle Croci*, in Italian), which used to be cells for the prisoners. Several questions crossed my mind. Do the museum keepers release the pigeons in the evening? Are they embodied memorials of the entrapment, impotence, and despair? Living witnesses of the infrastructure of violence? Their noise enabled me to listen to the voices of the unheard and to put down some textual and video notes, which further built up a poem opening new questions. Could a video poem stand as an example of radical listening, a “counter-listening” (Ouzounian, 2023) that follows manifestations of the camp's emptiness but reaches beyond? Beyond the wooden and sandblasted concrete, searching for possible creative transformations of haunted past and the (im)possible escape routes (*vie de fuga*, in Italian).

Infrastructure of violence

Špela Ledinek Lozej

Translated by Ana Jelnicar

trapped pigeons flutter in the warehouse
the cooing and flailing mixed with the traffic
noise and voices of visitors, the voices
I have no desire to hear
as they drown out the voices of those
before them
who had carved the initials of their
presence during the long, dreary and
deafening nights to those of us who will
come and leave after them

for the new arrivals, those before them
were full of questions about the world
beyond the walls
but once the SS soldiers came with the
gramophone, unleashing their dogs, and
launching a drunken party
no more questions were asked
in the knowledge that the wind and the sea
would sweep the newcomers away
while the unheard voices, the barking of
dogs, and gramophone' music
would build a concrete void of hollowed-out
silence

Link to videopoem:

<https://youtu.be/mCgK8pgJlG4>

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Walking Pedagogy: “Learning How to Walk” Revisited

Dani Schrire, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

“Learning to walk: Walking as Cultural Practice” is a course that was taught already five times as part of the Programme in Cultural Studies at the Hebrew University. This paper reflects on lessons learnt from this experience of walking pedagogy.

When I joined the faculty of the program in Cultural Studies at my university in 2015, I decided to teach a class on walking with the provocative title “Learning to walk: Walking as Cultural Practice”. I had a vague idea of what that may mean in practice and it gradually became clearer to me. I teach it every second year – so far, I taught it five times, which provided a broad enough perspective to reflect on this pedagogical experience. I do this by going over the structure of the course, presenting the diverse final papers written by students in the course and focusing on a few examples, before I conclude.

Over the years I added and subtracted readings from the syllabus, adding and removing themes, but the structure remained more or less the same:

In the first meeting, I typically begin with a description of the mechanics of walking – the gait cycle and formulas that biological scientists use to describe the double pendulum that is walking. I explain that this biological description is not what the course is about and that as much as walking has a clear physical articulation, it is a cultural practice. To illustrate this, we go over

the many words in English and Hebrew used for walking. After that, we read Ray Bradbury’s *The Pedestrian* to exemplify how in literature walking can convey various messages and particularly the rich ways in which the simple act of walking can be described in writing.

In the second meeting, we read Marcel Mauss’ “Techniques of the Body” and a short article on gesture – reflecting on approaching walking as a cultural technique and as a gesture.

These first two meetings form the introduction to the entire course, after which we go over different well-known walking figures: The Romantic walker, the flâneur, the flâneuse, the pilgrim and the spiritual walker

We then discuss various theoretical engagements with walking: De Certeau’s idea of walking as tactic and in general his conception of embodied knowledge against scopic knowledge, walking and theories of affect, marches and political engagement, walks as art and specifically the Situationists’ *dérive*, walking and disability studies, walking and intangible heritage.

In the final meeting, students present briefly their plans for the final paper.

Each class is based on different readings (typically more than two articles) and a preparatory internet forum discussion in which students react to these readings by bringing to the discussion various examples – visual, textual, ethnographic vignettes, etc. We further discuss these for an hour in class, after which we prepare a walk based on the texts – for ten minutes we collect ideas of how to perform these texts, asking where we ought to walk, how, what we should think about and do, and so on. We then take about twenty minutes to walk – I do this typically about eight times in the course,

deliberately letting students get uncomfortable about this act of interpretation. In fact, in the first meeting when I tell students that we would actually be walking, I am often confronted with worried eyes that never return to the second meeting. However, this is the most important pedagogical aspect of the course: after the walk, students are requested to react in the internet forum about the gap that they noticed between their understanding of the text before the walk and after. I find this performative hermeneutic drill extremely important. It is uncomfortable for students who are used to thinking with their heads and not with their feet. Yet, through this, the general aim of the course becomes much more concrete – understanding how difficult it is to talk or write about walking and the limits we have in approaching texts on walking and our thoughts on culture as practiced.

The final assignment concerns investigating one particular walk – students are requested to describe one such walk and then provide interpretations that try to explain how this walk can be understood in a larger context. Over the years I have received some of the most thought-provoking papers in this course (in comparison to other courses); I attribute this to the fact that this entire meditation of writing the unwritable calls for introspection – students are required to provide contours to a phenomenon that has no clear name and this is extremely demanding.

Thirty-nine papers were written in this course (on average, eight papers were written every time I taught the course):

1. The walks in the writings of Netiva Ben Yehuda (a female Hebrew writer)
2. Walks in the Jerusalem market (Shuk)
3. Female walkers in the [Jerusalem] Mamila open mall

4. World Sauntering Day in Tel Aviv 2016
5. [Gay] Cruising in the Urban Street [from New York's 1970s to the Grindr App]
6. On the Flâneur [a literary-poetic-philosophical reflection]
7. A walk in the [Jerusalem] Gazelle Valley Urban Nature Park [Landscape architect reflections]
8. On the body that goes nowhere: A walking recipe in Ernesto Pujol's *Awaiting* [performance]
9. The Sub-Urban Flâneur: Friday Evening Walks in West Rishon Le'Zion Suburb
10. Walking Off Course: Walking With or Away from Religion
11. Jerusalem's "Slut walk"
12. Match day: Fans walks to the football stadium
13. The visitor's experience of walking through the Yad Vashem (Shoah) Museum
14. The Walk of Balak [a dog character] in Shay Agnon's Novel *Tmol Shilshom (Only Yesterday)*
15. Walking in London Supermarkets in times of COVID
16. Walking the Ramparts' Tour of the Old City Walls of Jerusalem
17. Walking like a model: Global communities, Techniques and Gestures of the Catwalk
18. A Women's Walking Group as a Means of Advancing Healthcare

19. Walking meditation in the retreats of the “Tovana” Association
20. Pedestrians: Ramblers or Traffic Vehicles? The position of Israeli Planning Authorities towards Pedestrians
21. The walks of those accompanying blind people
22. Walking in Rio: The walk of *The Girl from Ipanema* in its Cultural Context
23. The Walk of Shame of American Men-Basketball Players
24. Walking Modernity: Gaston Lagaffe’s Flâneur [French comics]
25. Walking in the teamLabs Planet Exhibition in Tokyo
26. George Sand’s androgenic attire as a basis for freedom of movement [a female flâneur]
27. Jewish women walkers on the Temple Mount
28. Geo-therapeutics between dance and walking: Pina Bausch’s *Seasons’ March* and its Re-enactment in Tel-Aviv 2019
29. Walking après Batya Gur’s *Literary Murder: A Critical Case*
30. Period Walks in Kibbutz Ne’ot Smadar [a particular kind of meditation walk]
31. Disabilities and Boundaries [reflections on walking and disabilities]
32. *Lecha Dodi* in Jerusalem streets [eve of shabbat walks in Jerusalem’s religious neighbourhoods]
33. Women walks to the Mikveh [ritual bath]
34. May 1st Marches in Haifa

35. The weekly marches of the Sheikh Jarrah demonstrations
36. Handmaid Walks in Israel [2023]
37. *Macarita Ponte Tacon* – carnival walking in Tenerife [men walking on high-heels]
38. Walking to the fields and identity formation in a small agricultural village in the South of Israel
39. Crossing fences in the Golan Heights

In retrospect, I realise that this is a real privilege to be able to read on walks of such diverse contexts. The best papers, I felt, were those that captured a certain cultural subconscious through a close examination of walking practices. About one-third of the papers were truly magnificent in their creativity and of these I am focusing on five, in analyzing their achievements and providing more of a sense of the kind of papers that were the outcome of this course.

Guy’s seminar paper on walkers in the market (Shuk) tackled a rather mundane form of walk. He engaged in how people walk in the Shuk and how they narrate it, based on participant observation and walking. His paper opened up a whole lot of practical know-how.

The next example on the Suburban Flâneur was written by Ytav Bouhsira who lectured about this in SIEF in Göttingen (2017), is somewhat similar to Guy’s work. Ytav is an architect and his sensibilities, which were gathered through walking interviews managed to grasp the vibe of West Rishon Le’Zion – on the face of it, perhaps a suburban horror. These walks on Friday afternoon allowed one to notice an odd, somewhat exotic, suburban utopia that emerges from these introspective walks, reminding one of the Mass Observation Project in its sensibility to the mundane. Ytav discussed the specific

materiality of this form of suburban dwelling when he contemplated the kind of walks and the kind of walking gear these suburban walkers have.

Daniela Seltzer's "Walking away from religion" formed the basis of a seminar paper which was then transformed into a fabulous MA thesis, which she presented in the "Ethnography with a twist" conference at Jyväskylä University (2019). Based on interviews with ultra-orthodox women – those who became religious and those who became secular – it offers an empathetic account of their lives. This emic study of walking was based on comparing different sets of views, interviewing also actresses who perform on TV or theatre ultraorthodox women, juxtaposing different narratives – those that highlighted the physicality of such walks and those emphasizing spirituality.

Match Day by Jonathan follows the walk of fans to stadiums – one of the most affective collective walks, one can think of. It manages to capture an entire vibe by paying attention to chants, sweat and emotions in ways that give words to what each one who ever went to a match recognizes instantly.

Finally, Yael's auto-ethnography mixed with ethnography of religious women walking to the *mikveh* purification baths (religious women visit them every month after their period so that they can be "pure" for their husbands when they have intercourse) engages the unspeakable on different levels – whether it is the walk, the shame, the idea of following a religion but also examining it critically.

These papers examine very different kind of walking techniques that cover an array of human experiences. All these papers have in common that they were extremely engaging and captivating. They approached culture from the

feet, with no pretense and with a clear avoidance of labeling and representations. In retrospect, this may also explain why it is a difficult course to teach: as an instructor I often felt insecure about losing "the entire picture"; in the course I pay close attention to insights that are generated through this attention to affects and emotions, which are not predictable. In that sense, the desire that students would feel uncomfortable takes over the entire presence in the course. However, it is perhaps the fact that during the course, students feel a certain unease that allows them to take risks in their own investigations in ways that are intellectually rewarding: often papers from the course offer accounts of cultures that are subterranean in ways that avoid many clichés.

In a broader consideration of the state of Cultural Studies in 2024, clearly such papers went beyond the representational aspect of culture, avoiding often predictable insights. Walking necessitated to go beyond this in ways that make theory humbler in Dorothy Noyes' terms (2016). Movement in itself has this kind of effect and studying it allows for new concepts of these troubling times (Haraway 2016) to emerge. In a world, where (and when) much of the conceptualizations of modernity seem inapt, this has become crucial.

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Archiving silences

By Nataša Rogelja Caf, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

The essay is a result of the project *Route Biographies: Walking and Writing as Methods for Researching Border Regions* focusing on the relationship between research essays, field notes, and field-work diaries, between scholarly text and essays, and scrutinise the utility, expediency, and appropriateness of walking and writing as research methods in anthropology. Bringing to the fore steps, words, and thematic paths, the essay seeks to illuminate the in-between spaces understanding walking and writing as cognitive processes that strive to embrace uncertainty, admit to unknowability, and are open to the unexpected – all too often forgotten quality of scientific research. The essay presented circulates around the idea of archiving silences in the framework of Istria, a peninsula in the Northern Adriatic area, historically replete with borders and routes. Can we embrace the notion of routes as an archive of absences, the essay asks? Could that thought be specifically useful in understanding Istria and the Gulf of Trieste, strongly characterized by population movements, displacements, border changes, and its specific geolocation? Namely, the most northern Mediterranean bay creates specific circumstances for various (non)movements, (non)routes, and (non)relations. Plenitudes and absences, silences and noises.

“An archive presupposes an archivist, a hand that collects and classifies”, wrote Arlette Farge (2013), a French historian. But what if there are

only silences left? What then of an archivist? Of an archive?

In a certain section of our infrastructural walking seminar⁴, a colleague who walked with us proposed to focus on sounds. She asked us to inspect, feel, think, and approach research questions through our ears, giving us a sound booklet with QR codes. I thought of this small gift as a portal to the audible world, tailored with care and filled with songs and quotes. It fostered my emotional relationship with the world, with something big(ger). I listened to Jean Genet while walking the streets of Trieste/Trst. “We are realising more and more that a poetic emotion lies at the origin of revolutionary thought...”.

It was the seminar's second day, meaning that the noise of machines at building sites and the strange buzzing of warning beeps in the tunnels that we visited the first day were far behind, although I could still recall them. They were echoes bouncing off my memory. I walked through the urban spring towards the darker layers of the city - towards the infrastructures of violence. My earphones temporarily muted the outside world. But although I was eager to embrace the idea of researching (infrastructure) through/with sound, entering the Risiera di San Sabba/Rižarna, a redbrick rice factory used in WWII as a concentration camp, an infrastructure used for transforming life into death, I couldn't help thinking of silences instead. I muted my phone but couldn't unmute the Risiera. It wasn't as if I couldn't hear anything. The silence I experienced was audible (my steps, pigeons, a door creaking...) but heavily burdened with muteness. Sounds that couldn't or refused to sound.

⁴ The essay was written in a research project *Route biography* (J6-4611) as a part of walking-writing

seminar on infrastructure lines in Istria, peninsula in the NE Adriatic region.

Walking, listening, and hearing the place made me think about how to approach silence anthropologically and what and where silence is. Are silences absent or present? What is the relation between silence and absence? Does silence have an echo? Can we think of silence as a presence of absences? Silence as a refusal? Resistance? Impotence? Suppression? Shelter? What about its opposites? I couldn't embrace the notion of silence as the opposite of speech. In the commemorative hall, I heard testimonies of survivors riddled with voids. Listening to their narratives, I heard silences. I also thought of the noise, not as opposite but as complementary to silence. Entering the tunnels near Divača, I expected silence, a deep dark earthy silence, at least in one part of our visit. Still, amid the mountain, I was surrounded by beeping and flickering lights, with bright LED lines conjuring up the bubbly atmosphere of the day. Here, the silence was pierced by noise, the darkness with light. Could noise be the close cousin of silence, overshadowing, piercing, furrowing, and comforting the world, as silence does? As darkness does?

Writing (this essay) several threads came together – personal and professional, coincidental, fleeting, and casually connected. Five of them surfaced. The book I am reading, the essay I wrote weeks ago about counter-archives, the conversation with my husband about sound, infrastructure (em)/(dis)placing Istria and vice versa, and methodological questions related to infrastructure. I let these seemingly unconnected threads walk side by side in the following pages, hopefully drawing a single braid line at the end, enlivening the computer screen. Computer as an infrastructure of my thoughts?

The book

Paper as infrastructure for thoughts? Narrative as infrastructure? Could we think of a narrative as practical support underpinning an enterprise, and could we extend the notion of infrastructure, following Marilyn Strathern, including “ideas or assumptions that may be sustaining the purpose of enquiry, to the notion of ideational or conceptual infrastructures” (2018, pp, 49--51). The book was here. A colleague of mine gave it to me just before we went on the walking seminar. A beautifully written book about the world crumbling apart. About the inventory of echoes, an archive of lost sounds and lost children, quoting some of the authors embedded in our sound booklet. A coincidence? Possible, but not likely. Reading it and later walking in Istria, my thoughts circulated the ideas of inventories of echoes, thinking about the stories gone or forgotten as if they never existed, moments passed by lives swallowed by the road, leaving behind emptiness. It's a book full of emptiness. Amid the chaos of migratory disasters, somewhere in the middle of the book, the main character suddenly realizes what she has to do.

...Everything that was there between Arkansas and Oklahoma was not there... And in the middle of it all, tribes, families, people, all beautiful things falling apart, debris, dust, erasure. But finally, there is something. There is this one certainty. It arrives like a blow to my face as we speed along an empty highway into Texas. The story I have to record is not the story of children who arrive, those who finally make it to their destinations and can tell their own story. ... the story I need to tell is the one of the children who are missing, those whose voices can no longer be heard because they are,

possibly forever, lost. Perhaps, like my husband, I'm also chasing ghosts and echoes (Luiselli, 2019).

The archive

A few weeks before our walking seminar I helped my colleagues with writing a text on counter-archives (Gombač, Rogelja Caf, Klun 2024). For me, the writing exercise served as an intellectual playground in rethinking the notion of (counter) archive. It was a painful process — as I am not an expert in theorizing archives — but, in the end, I was somehow proud of the introduction and conclusion I wrote and happy for this opportunity. Yet I had a feeling that the core idea was not moving in the right direction or at least in the direction that I felt was right. Suddenly I realized why. The ideational infrastructure behind the text was channelling thoughts that I was uncomfortable with. A black and white world. A counter-world. And even if I put certain words and thoughts in the text that strived to depart from the main route, it is indeed difficult or impossible to exit the highway outside the designated exits. I scattered words such as *depart, sideways glances, stepping aside* all over the text but the sentences were growing in other directions. “[...] The following text is an attempt to reflect on counter-archive as a tool to resist, or depart from structures of power and authority [...]” (ibid). But then I realized — with the help of my dear colleague who is intellectually enviably sharp, sometimes to the point that it hurts — what the problem was. I needed a cruel surgery and she helped. I erased the word *counter* and felt relief. I found myself on a different ground now where I was able to add things, instead of countering them. That allowed me to connect, to put side-by-side bits that normally wouldn't stand by (metaphors + concepts), creating

relations beyond the obvious. To smuggle in instead of confronting it.

...It seems like certainty would not be a quality in this place, and a sideways glance would have the potential to reach further. Metaphors would be added to concepts while roles would constantly circulate because – who can tell with certainty what kind of experiences will be needed for the future world and future archives? (Gombač, Rogelja, Klun 2024).

The sound of silence (not by Simon & Garfunkel)

What is silence anyway? How does it sound? How can one archive silence? Does silence have an echo? While I was mulling over these questions I started a conversation with my husband — an electrical engineer who tackled the problem a bit differently.

What do we hear?

Sound. But the question is do we hear silence or do we fail to hear?

You mean silence as an illusion? I refuse to believe that.

“Our encounter with silence might be cognitive, not perceptual. However, this debate has largely remained theoretical, without a key empirical test” (Goh, 2023).

What is sound anyway?

Waves. A certain vibrating object causes molecules and their atoms in some medium (often air) to move.

Air as infrastructure. That's cool. What about echoes? I am reading this book, about a guy collecting echoes of Apache past lives and his wife who collects stories of lost children, stories that were never told but exist somewhere in the

desert between Mexico and the US. Could this be possible?

“To Bosavi ears and eyes, birds are not just ‘birds’ in the sense of totalized avian beings. They are ane marna, meaning ‘gone reflections’ or ‘gone reverberations’. Birds are absences turned into presence, and a presence that always makes absence audible and visible. Birds are what humans become by achieving death” (Feld, 2015).

No, of course not.

But what if air remembers? In the same way as water does? Water does remember, right?

“Water memory is the purported ability of [water](#) to retain a memory of substances previously [dissolved](#) in it even after an arbitrary number of serial dilutions”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_memory).

Possible, but not likely. There is a problem with time.

What about echoes bouncing off my memory?

[No reply. Silence.]

The infrastructure and + in + with + on + around + within + without + above + below Istria

Can we embrace the notion of infrastructure as an archive of absences? Routes as an archive of absences? Could that thought be specifically useful in understanding Istria and the Gulf of Trieste, strongly characterized by population movements, displacements, border changes, and its specific geolocation? Namely, the most northern Mediterranean bay creates specific circumstances for various (non)movements, (non)routes, and (non)relations. Plenitudes and

absences, silences and noises. The Gulf of Trieste, above which we were walking, carves most deeply into the European mainland, where a segment of the hinterland is relatively low and easily traversed, opening as it does to Postojna’s Gate, the lowest and one of the widest transition valleys between the interior of central Europe and the northern edge of the Mediterranean, smaller but similar to the Rhone Valley, inviting in big stories routing and bordering the place (Rogelja & Spreizer, 2017). But observing Istria ethnographically, I always had a feeling that life was going on “under the bridge”. People explained how they were *under Austria*, *under Italy*, *under Yugoslavia*, *under Slovenia*, *under Ljubljana*, *under EU*, charting their routes according to the situation, smuggling in among the big stories (e.g. the new maritime border and UNCLOS, the Fresh Food Corridor, The Exodus, the foreign investments, the Second Track project...). I also learned that some stories are better left untold. They were very much present but mute, such as the old photos of Venetian-speaking fishermen and fishing boats from different periods blown up into large sepia-coloured posters pasted on the walls and doors of the public toilets in Izola. Reminders of the twentieth century that were staring at visitors without any explanation. Merely, it seems, for aesthetic pleasure. Mysterious traces of the past.

Walking from Divača to Trieste/Trst with the infrastructural questions in mind, made me think of Istria from another perspective. I was standing on the bridge (with my infrastructural questions in my mind) but simultaneously walking below it (with my body), observing but also imagining the relationships (not the peninsula), embracing the flickering above + below perspective from where the unstable twins – the silence + noise and the presence + absence became more understandable. What came out of this

experience is the importance of focusing on multidimensional dynamic relations that couldn't be charted on a one-dimensional map. Through the prism of relationships, the archive of silences became an option. The one who tries to listen by passing through becomes an archivist.

The method

In a previous walking seminar related to the Balkan migrant route, one of my colleagues made the following observation.

*The thought that circulates through this – not a finished one, not a reliable one, but surely pointing into a direction – is **“passing through” a way to engage with the absent?** Is walking by, rendering oneself a mere passerby, a promising way forward in understanding, maybe even scientific understanding? Could it be? It seems very counter-intuitive, the opposite of meticulously studying a phenomenon, it's merely glancing at it; spotting it and fleeing, making the encounter with the object itself brief, loose, flawed (or at least very exposed to chance). Could it be at least partially true; could objects/places/sites be approached in both ways – planned, rigid, dissecting way; but also fleeting, uncommitted, uncodified way? Is there a likelihood the “objects” (or remains or artefacts) and “emptied” places will “present themselves” as something different in each case; **could there be a different knowledge of an absence built depending on researcher's movements and stays?** Is there value to merge with the absent land, become one of its*

*things, moving through, but never settling, not claiming any land, not claiming any Things for oneself, just making oneself continuously absent from one place to another. (leave the absences be absent). **If valuable, this makes quite a case for walking seminars** (Klun, 2024, bold by NRC).*

Participant observation in anthropology is never static, as people, more or less, move all the time. And yet there are some practices and research subjects where walking seems particularly appropriate, such as pilgrimage, mobile practices of shepherds and livestock breeders and even researching rivers. The latter was the case in one of our previous walking seminars along the Rižana and Dragonja rivers. From the methodological point of view, we were trying to participate in the river's activities, trying to river-centre our research, following the (mobile) practices of the river interlinked with human activities, with our own experience, but also with the material surroundings — with the riverbed, the soil, the stone foundation... Could we think about walking/moving with infrastructure similarly, even though infrastructure would probably be more accurately understood as a riverbed? Talking with our first interlocutor at The Second Track we realized that he drives 250km every day to visit all the building sites, offices, problems, and people. His daily routine is mobile and relational and driven by enthusiasm. He is mobile, relational, and enthusiastic. But infrastructures also seem to be static as they are “matter that enable the movement of other matter” (Larkin, 2013). Infrastructures enable relations but stand still and as such, they demand also (non)mobile actors. Non-mobile researchers. “Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things” (ibid). Maybe also the

reminders of the absence of relations between things?

Thinking about methodological questions related to infrastructure, I asked myself what infrastructure does. It transforms, sustains, facilitates, relates ... In that sense walking/moving might be interesting for researching the relational character of infrastructures and the selective nature of this relationality.

The coming together?

Walking with infrastructure is interesting because it is frustrating. It feels too big and unmanageable. We cannot succeed; we can only try. The same feeling applies when trying to reach and collect the lost/hidden/suppressed stories, silences, and things gone by, carried away by the route. The best we can do is try “to get as close as possible to that which will always be missing” (Farge 2013). In Rižarna, I often looked up at the sky. At the construction site, my gaze was drawn to the patterns on the ground. But there is a lesson to be learned with “the trying and the impossibility of succeeding”. The infrastructure seems to be hidden from various aspects of everyday life because of its size. The same applies to silence (or noise). If something is (too) loud, the waves are (too) high, if it is (too) quiet, the waves are (too) low. To grasp infrastructure (or silence), we must envision it with computer models, plans, and sketches, imagining it. Touching it with the mind instead of the body. But by imagining it, we domesticate it, we make it more beautiful the models and charts pasted on the walls of the container looked nice, almost to the point of aesthetic pleasure, but loafing around at the end of the tunnel, being there with my body, I couldn't stop imagining the

karst cave below and above us. Not how it was charted on maps but how it would feel if I found myself in it. And I was close to it, very close. There was a feeling of chaos lurking beyond that wall. I had similar feelings in Rižarna. The horror was charted in the museum design but there was this silence...

Another thought crossed my mind — that of sight being quite useless when approaching infrastructure with the body. The smell, the sound, and even my imagination, and emotions seemed to be of greater importance. Didn't the locals also complain about the noise coming from the construction site?

Writing about the overall experience of the infrastructural seminar felt like I had to trust the emerging story. I surrendered to the *enormity* and *absence* by letting bits and pieces tell their story, creating new relationships. What we might gain from trying to “walk with the route” and/or trying to “archive silences/absences” is surrendering to the absurdity of the task that eventually might shift our perspectives. Thinking from above while standing below. Being (non)present here and here and here... Listening to the silence. Approaching Istria and routes from such mobile (non)presence and surrendering to (new) relationships might offer a possibility to understand silences and absences as an important part of the Istrian route archives.

What can be studied is always a relationship or an infinite regress of relationships. Never a thing (Bateson, 1972).

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Photos by author(s)

Spoken Walking-Drawings: A Workshop on Weaving Visual Voices into Dialogic Artifacts

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In this paper we present a workshop we conducted to facilitate the exploration of sensorial space and sensual reflections, in which the creative modalities of drawing and speaking become co-constitutive of each other and of the process of relating intimately with the environment. This workshop aims to enhance spatial awareness by combining walking and a map drawing method that explores the memory of the immediate embodied experience, and stimulates an inter-personal spoken interpretation of the drawn silent intimate maps.

While the act of drawing a map works as an introspection tool for exploring multiple narratives of an existing site, or of an imaginary project, the map can also grow into a platform for communicating *spoken insights* from, during and after walking a route. Although often attributed to artists, architects or designers, immediate mapping or re-construction of an experienced route is a journey that can be made by anyone to develop their spatial-environmental relationships. Mindful movement through various landscapes can cultivate and enhance spatial sensitivity, and the immediate map drawing that follow can foster a creative remembering of these landscapes within and through our bodies.

The mini-exhibition presented in this paper through words, drawings, photographs and videos reflects on the variations of collaborative “spoken” wayfaring-drawings crafted between the workshop facilitators and the participants, unfolding as visual and audial answers to individual narrative construction of meaningful routes.

Keywords: spoken drawings, environmental awareness, memory mapping, collaborative creativity.

Introduction

How do different people experience walking in silence?

How can a person open oneself to listening to the surroundings, while simultaneously listening to the waves within oneself?

Can a sensorial walk help enhance a dislocation from one’s ordinary perception of reality, and transcend one’s own relation to the surroundings into a deeply experienced and miraculous observation of the inner-and-outer space, as if seen for the first time?

Can one control the edge between an intimidating lone mode of walking in silence, and a peaceful inner dialogue with an effortless pace?

Can one give a visual voice to an embodied experience, regardless of one’s familiarity with or keenness to the artistic modes of speaking?

These were few of the questions behind the design of the workshop that took place at the

One By Walking conference in Hanaholmen, in September 2024. Grounded in, and inspired by the first author's previous work on creating relational knowledge through a combination of creative modalities, this workshop aimed to methodically experiment with intimate attuning through participation of a receptive researcher-artist community of people attending the conference (Bogdanova, 2021).

We approached the Hanaholmen island as a living creature with a life of its own, that in those few days was offering a home to various personalities from different cultural and professional landscapes. The *love for walking* was the experiential "line of fascination" (Blythe, 2016, 12) that had brought them together. Presentations, workshops and discussions aimed at introducing the creative life of each walking individual and their knowledge formation through processes relatable to, and sharable with the whole community.

As the workshop organizers, we were particularly interested to learn and discover how sensorial walking can encourage a process of invoking and sharing different forms of (embodied) knowledge and experiences. For this we used a guided, yet intuitive, map drawing process, which aimed to simultaneously evoke personal memories filled with inter-personal relationships.

This workshop experiment is a part of our broader endeavor to develop creative methods of producing knowledge – both in forming research data and in communicating insights produced through our research (see also Aula & Masoodian 2024). In this workshop we aimed to develop a participatory way of relating to the creative dimensions of walking. Instead of speaking about what we had planned, we

decided to inhabit the space by posing *creative questions* to the participants – with ourselves included as well. Our aim in cultivating this "art of posing questions" did not aim to simply create a "void" of expression for the participants, "but to place the reader" and listener "in a carefully shaped, well-defined void" (Turchi, 2004, 53).

Our aim was not just to explore walking as a modality of mapping experiential knowledge, but to also stimulate *speaking out* loud as a way of verbalizing whatever that took place within the relationships between the walking-self and the other-than-human environment. An intertwinement of written verses and spoken drawing required a dynamic rhythm of both speaking and listening, of being *one by walking* in a creative way, giving birth to collaborative artefacts, which:

- visually captured people's dynamic relationships with the environment,
- discerned something of importance to each participant, and led to mapping as a visual aid for narrating experiential memories.

Act 1: Sensorial Silent Walking

The meeting point for the workshop participants was the terrace outside the conference venue, facing the forest on the western side of the island – the linear edge of a semi-circular space, an architectural embrace of the hotel overlooking the water. A misty atmosphere, after a rainy and foggy morning. People arrived, going *around* or *through* the hotel building.

After a brief introduction, we invited the participants to take a short walk (around 15 minutes) around the surrounding natural environment that we named "The Enchanted

Forest". Avoiding the conventional silent walking method, in which the participants follow one another through a specific track, we encouraged each individual to "get lost" in the narrow strip of forest on that foggy morning (see Figure 1 and 2). The only "rule" was not to speak, and to walk in silence, alone in one's own world while being in an immediate proximity to the silence of others – both humans and other-than-human characters in the form of waves, wind, trees and leaves, each whispering in their own language. We invited the participants to try and recognize within those silences, the words and images coming from the inside. More importantly, we also asked them to think of someone they care about, and with whom they would want to share the experience of their walk in "The Enchanted Forest".

It is important to also note that we specifically tried to emphasize the importance of following one's own intuition and rhythm of walking – at one's own pace, as slow as one wishes. However, while "slowness" may bring peace to one person, it might be an imposed and unnatural pace for another. Also, since "slowness" has different meanings for different individuals, we use the term "slowness" in the context of avoiding "high speed", which Kagge (2019, 25) considers as a "menace of memory, because memory depends on time and spatial awareness":

"The longer I walk, the less I differentiate between my body, my mind and my surroundings. The external and internal worlds overlap. I am no longer an observer looking at nature, but the entirety of my body is involved." (Kagge, 2019, 97-98).

Kagge further elaborates on the experience of softening the limits between the self and the outside world using Merleau-Ponty's "lived perspective", where one's body and

surroundings "find a common language and are transformed into a unity larger than themselves" (Kagge, 2019, 97-98). In practicing presence and walking as a form of mastering and elongation of time, Kagge pays particular attention to the creation of memory. Walking, Kagge explains (2019, 17), helps us to forget our regular obligations like "opinions, expectations, and moods of the family and friends" to the extent that they become irrelevant, for a few minutes or hours.

In this workshop, we wanted to use this method of memory creation as a way of exploring the relationship between walking and one's personal memories. Our intention was to investigate whether it might be possible to use this method to answer questions such as: Can one evoke meaningful past inter-personal memories through silent walking? Can the attentiveness to the present moment help to evoke past inter-personal memories? Can memory-drawing help one to map trans-temporal fragments of one's embodied experiences?

Our expectations from this workshop were based on existing research showing that walking ethnographies of different kinds (e.g. [sensobiographic walking](#)) can be utilized to intertwine sensory observations in the present with evoking personal memories of the past. Environmental factors ranging from other-than-human species to weather, the social surroundings, the affective atmosphere bridging the individual experience with the outer space, and other situated affects, can combine to make silent walking a useful method for evoking and relating memories of the past through the awareness of the present (see also Aula & Masoodian, 2024).

In addition, our assumption was that remembering a person who is absent but meaningful and important to us could make us experience the present more intensely, through the silence of a personal space within the wider surroundings of the natural environment.



Figure 1. A participant on a sensorial silent walking.

Act 2: Silent Drawing of inter-personal maps

After the sensorial silent walking, the participants were invited to recall their experience by drawing an inter-personal map. The idea was that the map would be used as a means to share one's intimate experience with

the person one deeply cares about. We explained that the intimate map should be intuitively drawn, so as to visually reach out to the other person beyond space and time – thus mapping the walking experience for that person. The participants were provided with charcoal sticks and large sheets of white paper on which to draw their intimate maps.

We put the drawing papers on separate tables, providing some distance in-between, to make the drawing experience more personal.

During the map drawing session, the sky became brighter, and we experienced mild sun beams for a few minutes. The morning dew and the rain remnants from the previous day soaked through some of the papers, leaving their own trace on the softened material. All the tables, excluding one in the middle of the semi-circular space, were located at the soft edge between the hotel and the nature, on the porch that provided a safe place for a creative immersion into memory, thoughts and feelings (see Figure 3).

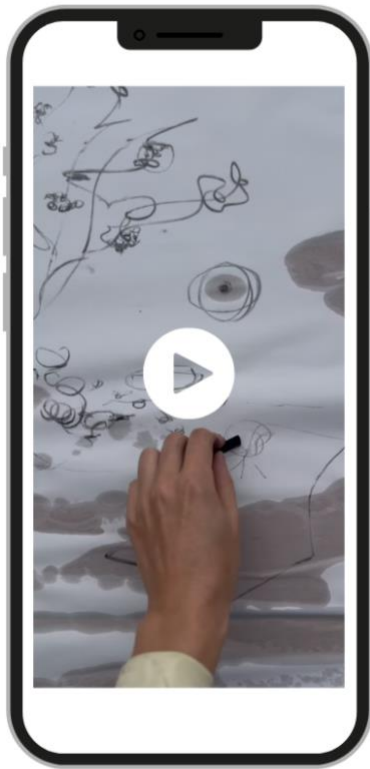


Figure 2. A link to a short video, framing the moments from the three acts (Ctrl+click to open).



Photo Courtesy of Hanna Musiol

Figure 3. The porch framing the creative map drawing space

The participants could draw their maps either individually or together with someone else. Some of the participants decided to sit next to each other, while a few of them shared the same paper, embroidering its territory from different sides of the shared paper.

We invited the participants to recall their encounters with the other-than-humans, whom they had met on the walk. They were encouraged to pay attention to intuitive encounters with the environment, and to all their senses, especially the tactile and auditory. We also asked them to think of the emotional content of their walk by posing questions such as: What memories were evoked from within one's self? What did one say to the forest, and did the forest reply back?

It is important to note here that in our workshop we emphasize that the map drawings should not be precise – taking the form of rough sketches. The participants were told to consider the map more as a memory aid for sharing their walking experience with the other person, who would not care much about the exact route taken during the walk, but would rather be interested to learn about the other-than-human encounters with, for instance, stones, pebbles, pinecones, perennials, mushrooms, and so on. We intentionally insisted on giving “human” characteristics to “non-human” characters, thus bringing them to life by entering into an embodied dialogue with them.

The map drawings varied between realistic representations of visual content of the environment, and more abstract, symbolic reconstructions of the walk routes taken by the participants. Patterns of gently disturbed water waves were present almost everywhere. So were branching treetops and bush and plant structures in a larger scale. The organization of the maps of the large sheets of paper were done mainly in intuitively scattered fragments.

One drawing, however, resisted the symbolic visual expression completely, by being done in

the format of a poem – a visual poetry nonetheless – floating into the waves of the sea (shown in Figure 5). Words of letting go, surrendering to the unknown directions of the water current, with a large territory of an empty space above the poem, marking the void of what cannot be expressed neither through words nor through drawings.

Another map had a circular form, structuring the remembered experience in layers of enclosure (see Figure 4). The central part was taken by few words and a bird – of a specific species or possibly a representation of a sculpture along the walking route. On one side, the circle is embraced by a dark texture, resembling the sea. On the other side, the circle is surrounded by vehicles, and a silhouette of some city resembling a medieval fortress that has been turned upside down.

Almost all drawings manifested recurring other-than-human characters present on the site: plants, mushrooms, stones inside the water, branches, sculptures, but also planes and other vehicles (Figures 4-9 and 10). Some of the maps were critically reflective of the particular nature of the site as a showcase exhibition of “artificial natural environment”, an aesthetic construction framed as nature inside the city, yet dominated by sea and air. One of them had the title “memorial to Finnish nature” and it offered a more radical perspective on the site, questioning what “nature” truly means, and in what forms it is actually endangered. Two of the paper sheets were used by the participants for collaborative drawings, each housing different languages on a single sheet of paper (Figures 6 and 7).

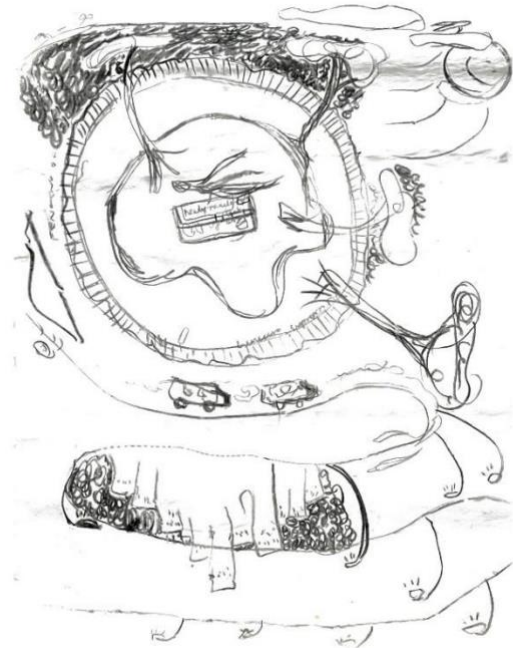


Figure 4. The Circular Drawing



Figure 5. The Visual Poem



Figure 6. Collaborative drawing by two participants, each on the opposite side of the format

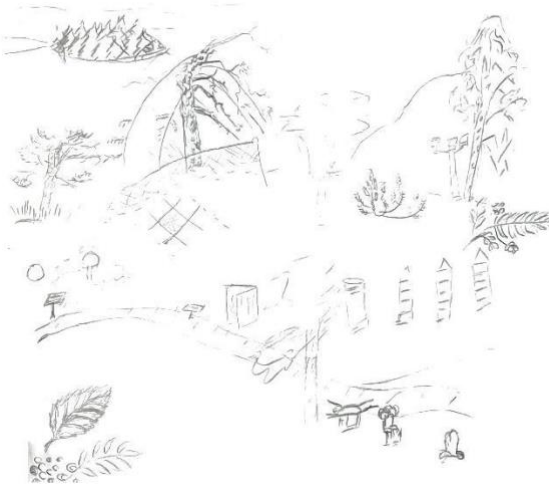


Figure 7. Collaborative drawing by two participants, fragments of experience around two invisible lines



Figure 8. Representative drawing: layers of imaginative perception

Act 3: Postcard to an Absent One

In the final part of the workshop, we wanted the participants to speak about their own sensory silent walking experience. To make the narration of these experiences more structured and therefore easier to analyze, we developed a postcard method. For this, we have designed a postcard template with incomplete sentences, where each participant is asked to write a few words about their walking experience, speaking directly to the person they would like to share their experience with – to send the postcard to (see figure 9 and 10). This acts as another method for capturing the most important elements of the remembered inter-personal memories, in a complimentary, but more structured, manner to the map drawing method.

To make these postcards a memorable workshop memento which the participants take away, on the other side they each include, for example, a drawing or painting of the environment where the walking routes are located. In this particular workshop, the postcards had the prints of

drawings by Viktorija Bogdanova, inspired by the landscapes of Hanaholmen island and Helsinki (see Figure 11).

Although the participants are invited to just read what they have written on their postcards, at this workshop, they actually gave a verbal introduction to their map drawings, by sharing in their own words what they had experienced during their silent walk, what they were thinking about during the walk, and why they choose to speak to the particular person they had in mind. After doing this, they then proceeded to read – or not read, in a couple of cases – the words they had written on their postcards.

It is interesting to note that the participants' narration and interpretation of their maps often differed from what was captured in their postcards. This illustrated how the map drawing and postcard writing methods might be evoking different kinds of inter-personal memories. It seems that the maps may have captured experiences more related to the environment and other-than-human characters, whereas the postcards may have been considered more about inter-personal relationships – particularly with the absent other to who the postcard was being addressed and sent to.

The postcard format aimed to summarize what was meaningful to each person and what they would remember from the walking experience. We wanted to give concreteness to the feelings, the walking route, the other-than-human beings encountered, the reasons for gratitude and the shades of feelings by asking the participants to name them specifically.

The postcard structure was designed as follows:




Figure 9. The Postcard Template.



Figure 10. The drawing overlapped with the postcard.

Below we present some of the text written by the workshop participants in the blank spaces within the postcard structure:

feeling:

- calm and prone to listening
- relaxed
- extremely privileged
- at peace
- a wistful longing
- joy and hope
- connected
- calm and missing you at the same time
- one with you in my body
- comfortable
- lucky
- dystopic
- immense gratitude for being here & a blissful pain of experiencing this without you

name of the path:

- jelly fish trail
- the unpath waterside
- xxx-lusive path
- familiar
- life
- imprisoned nature
- old green-red silence
- algae as a fussy mattress and spiders as non-scary creatures
- after you
- plan with silence
- slippery but possible
- memorial to Finnish nature
- stardust of displaced memories

met and spoke with:

- myself (repeats often)
- the trees and wind
- dead jelly fish
- berries, flowers and nature

- the water
- a singing mushroom
- so many dews falling down, crawling and creeping over the grass
- woodpecker
- the islands
- the moon, your voice coming from the trembling waves

feelings of comfort and peace in:

- the slow sound of water coming to the shore
- marveling at the fragile and strong lacework of the spider web suspended between beams, welcoming waters
- on the open seas
- dreaming
- standing on the rocks in front of the sea
- my body where I used to home you
- my mind
- seeing the forest on the other side of the sea
- looking at & dreaming of our mysterious red fruit tree

felt the urge to say “thank you” for:

- being so caring and patient
- a moment of harmony on a warm but rather grey morning
- exactly this: I still get to play, and get (almost) paid
- your presence
- having met you
- being able to enjoy what is truly important
- the bold blue future
- being who you are
- once again making me whole with the miracle of creation
- the birds
- holding me a safe place between the Moon and your heart.

We told the participants that reading the text of their postcards was not obligatory. However, all of them decided to “speak the words” they had written, and they did this almost effortlessly, regardless of the strongly personal nature of some of their memories and recollections.

Most of the participants mentioned that they had experienced *a sense of calmness*, which in our view is the opposite of arousal or heartbeat increasing. When calm, one can be sad or happy but balanced.

When reading and listening to the replies, it was clear that the absence of the chosen persons, and the presence in attentive walking in the present moment and place were not contradictory. People cared about how they walk, what they were drawing, what they were speaking, and how much they chose to share.

“We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in.” (Leopold, 1949, 214)

The pace of the workshop phases aided in unburdening any possible anxiety of overthinking and questioning “Am I doing this in the right way?” The relatively brief span time of the workshop stimulated a playful and experimental attitude in each of the three “acts” of the workshop.

Conclusions:

A Constructive Methodological Reflection

The workshop was guided by a desire to develop a method for visual understanding of people’s narratives in their relation to the environment. We were curious to map what is important for people, what is *important enough* that they draw

or write about it on a map, through words, symbols or images as common ways of creating shared understanding.

The Spoken Drawings will be further developed as a method in variations of other workshops, testing which elements work (or not work) well and how different people react to the creative process. Hence, for ourselves for those who wish to apply this method in their own research, we would suggest the following lines of further development, based on our insights of this specific Hanaholmen experience:

- Experiment with lowering the anxiety of the blank page by marking few points of orientation, within smaller formats.

Narrating in short written format appeared to be a good proposal: relatively effortless, structured, and concise to communicate with the others. Can we design a short format of this kind also in a visual manner?

Perhaps people would feel more relaxed in filling the blank space if it already contains some marks, however abstract or unclear. How could putting a few different points on the paper evoke easier orientation or beginning in the drawing process?

- Make the instructions more explicit: clarify that drawing map should not represent things too realistically, but it should rather be a conceptual circular mapped experience of the whole walk. The relationship between the mapping and the written cue such as the postcard is open for different framing.

- provide an anonymous evaluation format for the experience of the participants: what would they change or modify? Why would they recommend the same exercise to another person?

In the Hanaholmen experience, a delimited area combining framed natural elements in a cultural environment provided an easy space to wander in; and the professional context of an experimentally-minded conference community afforded a receptive participant group willing to engage deeply in the exercises provided, ready to share their personal reflections. Applying this type of method requires sensitivity to how much space is given for the participants to define how much they are willing to engage and share with others. The shared space in Hanaholmen was receptive for intimate engagement even in a short time frame; while the method itself in bringing together sensorial walking and wayfaring, drawing, writing and speaking proved efficient in accessing deeply affective in-situ remembering. We became assured that the multimodal acts of the workshop can reframe relational knowledge in meaningful ways through interpersonal creativity.

Acknowledgments

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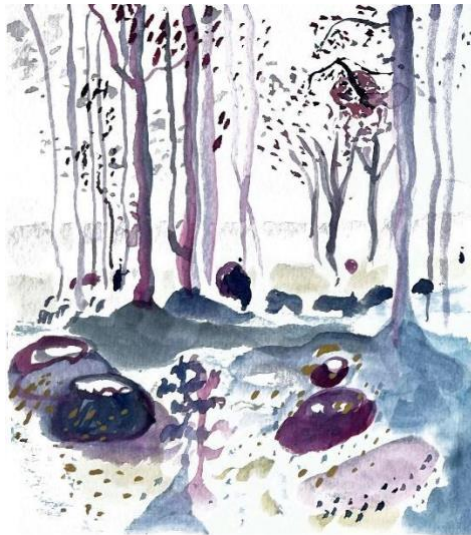
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Figure 11. A collage of Hanaholmen's landscapes: front page postcards. Drawings by Bogdanova.



Ecological Pilgrimage: Repairing Human-Forest Relations

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The paper joins the search for new ontologies, conceptual frameworks, approaches, metaphors, and practices to repair the weakened relations between natural ecosystems and human sociocultural worlds. It introduces the notion of an “ecological pilgrimage” as a walking methodology and social innovation that departs from historical connotations of colonial expeditions or religious ceremonies and enables rethinking what walking, and tourism can do in times of ecological crisis. Our work draws guidance from the discussions on “ecological reparation” as a bottom-up approach attentive to the mundane processes and everyday practices of solidarity and care that maintain life and foster liveable futures. Driven by a curiosity of what an ecological pilgrimage could be and become, the members of our team embarked on a pilot walk along the 1000 km long “*UKK trail*” through the boreal forests of Eastern and Northern Finland. Along with reflection on the future lines of inquiry, the paper shares a formative iteration of a video artwork of this almost forgotten, fragmented trail that reflects the imprint of historic and contemporary land use practices and industrial exploitation. The paper welcomes further discussion about the ways in which the recreational use of hiking trails can enable transforming and repairing more-than-human relations.

Introduction

Walking through unknown territory has been historically undertaken by pilgrims in search of moral or spiritual significance and transformation (Brudin Borg, 2022; Lunde, 2022; Munar et al., 2021). Today, we are witnessing walking movements in the North like “climate pilgrimages” and “walks for the future” that offer an opportunity for embodied reflection on the ecological crisis and our role within it (Lunde, 2023; see also Springgay & Truman, 2018). Contemporary artistic and curatorial events have also taken place along trails, such as the performative pilgrimages initiated through the Future Farmers’ *Flatbread Society* project in Oslo, Norway (2012-) and the lecture and performance formats introduced along the UKK trail in Kainuu, Finland during the *Mustarinda Community Convention* (2023). Drawing inspiration from these movements along with research on slow travel (Dickinson et al., 2011; Haapakoski, 2021; Kato, 2017), degrowth (Hall et al., 2021), bushcraft, ancestral skills, and cultural rewilding (Vlasov, 2023), as well as place-based and wild pedagogies (Blenkinsop et al., 2022; Wattchow & Brown, 2011), our research group has gathered around the idea of an “ecological pilgrimage” as a walking methodology and social innovation.

Just as pilgrimages have been traditionally undertaken as a spiritual search, we see the value of ecological pilgrimage as a journey that can shape worldviews, values, and beliefs and help to find meaning and ways to engage in ecological crises (Reason, 2017; see also Lunde, 2023; Redick, 2023). Moving away from the historical associations with colonial expeditions or religious rituals, our rethinking of pilgrimage

emphasises the inherent interdependency between human physical and mental health and the well-being of ecosystems (see also Farkic et al., 2021). Our work is guided by an interest in ecological pilgrimage as a means of engaging stakeholders in situated challenges of the Anthropocene and facilitating profound personal and societal transformation in outdoor recreation settings (Munro et al., 2022; Tsing et al., 2021). The idea of ecological pilgrimage builds on our previous walks and research with the notion of proximity in tourism settings, that is, as a sensitive approach to supposedly mundane beings, places, and thoughts (Rantala et al., 2023; Rantala et al., 2024). Through our work, we engage with the posthumanist and new-materialist discussions that seek to cultivate the art of attentiveness and encourage “down-to-earth” engagement with the ongoing ecological crisis (Budbandt et al., 2022; Tsing et al., 2024).

Our work joins the existing efforts that challenge the prevailing nature-culture dichotomy by highlighting the interdependency of human and nonhuman well-being and envisioning how multispecies communities can co-exist in creative, reciprocal, and regenerative ways (e.g. Haraway, 2016; Papadopoulos et al., 2023; Tsing et al., 2021). With the notion of multispecies, we refer here to the entanglements of ecosystems and human sociocultural worlds that should no longer be researched or approached in isolation (Budbandt et al. 2022). Our ambition is guided by sustainability scientists who emphasise the importance of human-nature connectedness and relational worldviews as an effective leverage point for sustainability transformations in the present era of ecological crisis (Riechers et al., 2021; West et al., 2021). We approach biodiversity loss, climate change, resource extraction, and pollution all as interlinked

symptoms of a deeper relational crisis caused by a collective human failure to cognitively recognise human entanglements with the nonhuman world – both on individual and societal levels (Ibid.; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Rantala et al., 2023). Instead of depending merely on the existing and emerging technoscientific solutions, there is an urgent need for new ontologies, conceptualisations, approaches, metaphors, and practices that can be used to repair the weakened relations between natural ecosystems and human sociocultural worlds (Budbandt et al., 2022; Mol, 2021; Papadopoulos et al., 2023).

As a central sphere of leisure, modern forms of tourism can be seen as a key arena for articulating and testing alternatives for the current capitalist ethos and repairing the weakened relations between human and non-human communities (Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2020). For this purpose, we have been drawing theoretical guidance and inspiration from Papadopoulos, Puig de la Bellacasa, and Tacchetti’s (2023) research, which indicates the growing demand for opportunities to experience and engage with ecological reparation processes. The notion of ecological reparation addresses the concern of multispecies relations that have been weakened by the prevailing anthropocentric, growth-oriented, extractive, and colonial mindsets. Along with Noel Salazar’s (2024) keynote, “The Gravity of Walking: A more-than-human Perspective” at *the One By Walking Conference* at Hanaholmen, Finland, in September 2024, our research is driven by a curiosity about how to maintain and repair these relations. Indeed, by coupling ecology with reparation, Papadopoulos et al. (2023) wish to bring attention to the interconnectedness between ecological and reparative obligations. We find it inspiring that ecological reparation

“could indicate a move beyond top-down, individualised and abstracted interventions, towards processes of repair of material relations in their complex embeddedness in communities” (ibid, p. 3). This can take place through creating and sustaining practices that encourage sensitivities, affectivities, and intimacies in multispecies communities. Ecological reparation in the form of “minor acts of care” (ibid, p. 3; see also Zylinska, 2014) resonates well with our idea of ecological pilgrimage as a sphere for activism and hope.

Instead of approaching non-human nature as a resource to be exploited for human benefit or as pristine wilderness separate from human activities, we share an interest in repairing and building duckboards that balance the recreational use of nature with the preservation of healthy ecosystems (see, e.g., Huijbens, 2024; Salazar, 2024). In their work, Papadopoulos et al (2023) illustrate how the possibilities of ecological reparation can be found in “mundane processes and practices of care and solidarity” (p. 4). With these and many other thoughts in mind, the members of our team embarked on our pilot walk along the UKK trail (see Figure 1) in the summer months of 2024. This 1000-kilometre trail runs along the Russian border from Koli in North Karelia to the northeast corner of Finnish Lapland/Sápmi. It is named after Finland’s former president Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (UKK), who hiked in this region in the Cold War era; that is, when many decisions regarding Finland’s land-use policies were put in place, particularly concerning the building of hydropower dams and the draining of mires and wetlands for use in the forestry industry. Today, the almost forgotten UKK trail follows old trade routes and nature paths and is fragmented by clear-cuts.



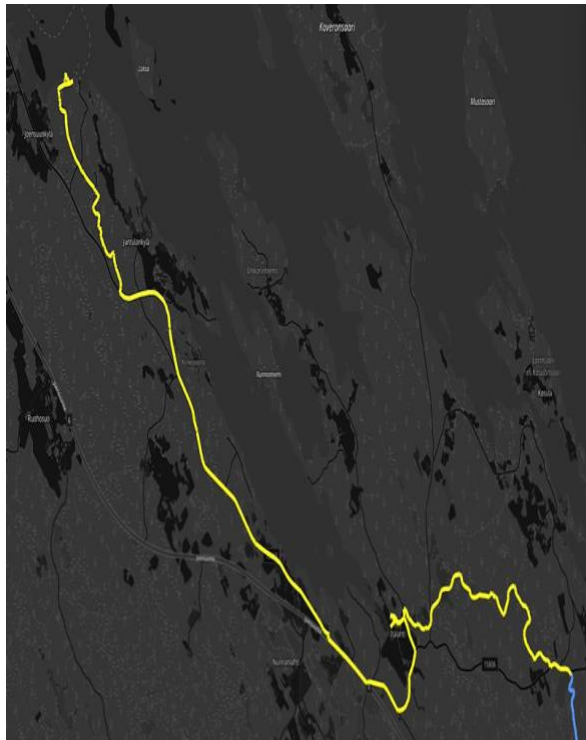
Figure 1. UKK trail going through the boreal forest trails of Eastern and Northern Finland (Graphics Anastasia Savinova)

In the following section, and as part of a creative practice-research involvement with the UKK trail, we include within this paper a formative iteration of a video artwork which demonstrates, extends, and sits in conversation with the thoughts formed and presented through our writing.

UKK trail

Video by Neal Cahoon:

https://vimeo.com/1075617586/88e6c0d466?s_hare=copy



Three lines of inquiry

What might an ecological pilgrimage be and become? We discussed this question while we were making our way through the unmarked terrain where clear-cuts were followed by protected nature reserves, watching birds (and occasionally disturbing their peace), fishing from a canoe in the rain, checking each other's bodies for ticks, picking wild plants and ripening berries for breakfast, setting up tents and tarps, and cutting firewood for yet another dinner of mashed potato powder. For us, this explorative journey is only starting, and we embrace this moment of not knowing exactly where it will take us. Nevertheless, three paths for inquiry make themselves visible at this moment.

First, we need to think about what kind of landscapes we walk as we embark on an ecological pilgrimage. The majority of the

traditional pilgrimage destinations seem to feature places of religious significance and cultural heritage or beauty and serenity of nature. This is to provide the pilgrim with meaningful spiritual and aesthetic experiences. The name of the "ecological" pilgrimage can lure us into the romantic ideal of pristine wilderness and landscapes of untouched nature. There is no doubt that a protected old-growth forest – with rare species of birds singing in the canopy, deadwood laying on the ground, and centuries-old connections of mycorrhizal networks under our feet – can offer rare moments of ecological consciousness and nature connection as a much-needed remedy for the alienated urban life (see also Munro et al., 2022). Yet along the UKK trail, a path that leads you through an old-growth forest can suddenly become a clear-cut – an immense uprooted bare land stretching for at least a kilometre. After that, it might take you along a railroad that is used to transport millions of tons of timber to produce biofuel, toilet paper, and other commodities. This railroad may lead you to an old railway station that a local couple purchased to live and protect as a site of cultural history. For a few years now, they have been living next door to an industrial timber loading facility where the machines are making so much noise that the floor and windows are vibrating day and night (Cahoon et al. 2024). If you walk off the trail, you can also visit an art and science residency that runs as an experiment in small-scale renewable energy and post-fossil living next door to an old-growth forest (Mustarinda, 2025). Reflecting the fragmented, disturbed, and uprooted reality of contemporary forest and energy landscapes in Finland and elsewhere, the UKK trail is a true example of a "patchy Anthropocene" (Tsing et al., 2021). Drawing focus on these kinds of patches can help us to gain more nuanced understandings of multiple ways of relating, knowing, and attending to the

changing world (Ibid. Rantala, et al. 2024). The “task” of an ecological pilgrimage might be precisely to bring us human walkers face-to-face with these new ecological realities – confronting the problematic anthropocentric heritage of modern societies and embracing those pockets of life, radical experimentation and regeneration. This urges us to ask questions like how we go about repairing forest ecologies and what the role of tourism is in this work.

Second, this emerging inquiry into ecological pilgrimage reminds us to stay proximate with the materiality of hiking practices. We have experienced first-hand how hiking can be a lesson in simple, low-energy living; that is, when, to satisfy our earthly needs, we rely on the things that fit in our backpacks or can be obtained in the forest. Yet, as we pack for the journey, travel to our destinations, move through the landscape, and make camp, we are also acutely reminded about the impacts of modern-day outdoor practices and tourism infrastructures on climate and the environment. Despite leaving our everyday routines, our ways of being, navigating, and communicating are still highly technological (using smartphones, audio equipment, and GPS devices), to increase comfort and accessibility. This is useful to become aware of, and to use the experience to ask important questions for ourselves, but also for society. An ecological pilgrimage cannot be ecological only in its ends – we also need to talk seriously about the means. To encourage the use of simple tools, natural materials, not needing so many things, embracing proximity in tourism by rediscovering places we inhabit. We need to think concretely about what infrastructure is needed around the pilgrim and how this infrastructure can be implemented with reciprocity and respect for the places and beings that host us. Least of all do we want to turn the idea of an ecological

pilgrimage into another product of the productivist growth-capitalist tourism economy. Instead, we set off to explore what alternative practices and expressions of the moving self can facilitate more sustainable, reciprocal, and reparative ways of living.

Then, to the third set of questions or line of inquiry, turning to the inner dimension of the pilgrim’s lived experience, we wonder what kind of transformative journeys ecological pilgrimage might facilitate. Pilgrimages have been historically undertaken for some form of personal transformation, be it for personal growth, wisdom, spiritual awakening, healing, or dissatisfaction with contemporary Western life, to name just a few (Frey, 1998). There is no shortage of “transformative needs” while navigating the complex and dark terrain of hope and despair amidst ecological crises (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). In line with our previous work on proximity tourism and multispecies hospitalities, we conceive of personal transformation in non-anthropocentric terms – as a relational, more-than-human matter of concern and care. Thus, we are wondering how transformative experiences become co-created and negotiated in situated multispecies encounters. How can an ecological pilgrimage help us gain an understanding of the ways in which human and non-human well-being are inherently entangled? To what extent can transformative experiences be supported through interventions like storytelling and guiding? And as often discussed in the context of pilgrimages (Frey, 1998), how can transformative experiences from the trail be integrated into everyday life for wider and deeper ecological transformation?

Envisioning future paths

In the face of the challenges of living on a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017), we are also witnessing a resurgence and growing diversity of long-distance hikes and pilgrimages to sacred sites around the world (Brudin Borg, 2022; Collins-Kreiner 2016; Digance, 2003; Lunde, 2022, 2023). Within these settings, and through walking simply as an approach towards closer relational encounters, many important questions emerge for us as researcher-walkers to address. Through developing reparative practices and organising “Ecological pilgrimage” walking interventions, our hope is to encourage direct engagement with the living conditions of multispecies communities; that is, an engagement that is not curated or pre-packaged into a particular narrative of nature. Instead of turning the UKK trail into the one-and-only ecological pilgrimage, we find it valuable to explore how the recreational use of hiking trails, in a diversity of settings, can enable transformative engagement, and offer an alternative to predominant growth, consumption, and fossil-fuel-driven forms of recreation. Perhaps most of all, our work is driven by a curiosity about the adventures and activism that begin from one’s front door.

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Walking in Time: The Overseas Colonies Exhibition in Naples

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The Overseas Colonies Triennial Exhibition (*Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*) was officially inaugurated on May 9, 1940, in Naples, Italy, in the presence of the — by then — Emperor Vittorio Emanuele III. It was meant to showcase the African and Mediterranean territories that Italy had acquired by force between 1885 and 1939, and to contribute to producing a colonial mentality and culture in the Italian people. The imperial fascist dreams of Italy did not last long, and the Exhibition had to shut down just a month after its inauguration following the first British air strike and bombing of Naples.

Today, the Colonial Exhibition still stands, bearing a shortened version of its old name (*Mostra d'Oltremare*). The site has been partially repurposed as a trade fair and a venue for concerts, also hosting a natural park, an amusement park, sports facilities, bars, and a school among the ruins of the colonial pavilions. With this paper, I intend to present a walking ethnography of the Colonial Exhibition, focusing on the historical, ecological, and more-than-human ghostly encounters that still haunt the site. Using a critical heritage analysis (DeSilvey 2017) and a geo-historical approach (Valisena 2022), I analyze the material, memorial, and ecological layers that constitute the difficult heritage of the site (MacDonald 2008).

Introduction

“The Overseas Colonies Exhibition [...] will be a panoramic and synthetic overview of what

Italian value and work have accomplished in Africa. It will also document the capacity of the Italian Race to expand in the world [...] By presenting the reborn Imperial power of Italy, the Exhibition is an act of pride but, more importantly, it is an orientation center for Mussolini’s Italians, who just begun to march again to the rhythm of Roman legions”.

This is how the official booklet introduced the Overseas Colonies Triennial Exhibition to the Italian public. Conceived in 1936, the Exhibition was inaugurated on May 9, 1940, marking the fourth anniversary of the Italian Fascist Empire. Designed as a new colonial settlement (*città di fondazione*) following the model of other highly propagandized Fascist land reclamation projects, the Exhibition was established in Naples, the city planned to become the main port of Imperial Italy and the gateway to Fascist Italy’s African and Mediterranean territories. Spanning approximately 1,200,000 square meters, the Exhibition was set to feature 57 buildings, a zoo with 4,000 animals, an amusement park, an African indigenous village with actual Ethiopian people, 250,000 Mediterranean and exotic plants, 14 kilometers of new streets, and newly constructed metro and cable car lines—all situated in the heart of the newly remediated Phlegraean Fields, to the west of Naples (Aveta, Castagnaro, Mangone, 2021).

The Exhibition was intended to be renovated every three years, each time following a different theme related to Fascist Italy’s expansion and its supposed “civilizing mission” across the seas. The Colonial Exhibition served as both a massive national monument to the Italian Empire and a showcase of Fascist Italy’s military and purportedly civilizing accomplishments. It was also a modern, interactive, and immersive

propaganda tool designed to shape colonial imaginations, educate the Italian public in imperialist thinking, and entice potential colonizers to join the small group of Italians who had already relocated to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Albania, and the Dodecanese Islands to participate in the colonial enterprise. In Benito Mussolini's vision, the construction of the Colonial Exhibition marked only the beginning of a series of monumental and cultural interventions in Italy's natural and built environments, all aimed at embedding fascist imperial values into the nation's body and spirit (Armiero, Biasillo, Hardenberg 2021).

Yet, much to the fascists' dismay, this grand scheme lasted only one month. Italy entered the Second World War alongside Nazi Germany on June 10, 1940, and the Exhibition was subsequently closed. The site was severely damaged by allied bombing, with around 60% destroyed. It was used as a hospital by the Italian army, then taken over by German occupying forces in 1943, and finally turned into a campsite by the Allied Army in 1944. In 1952, the site was renovated, divided between sports and research facilities and NATO forces, and rebranded as a national exhibition site, hosting the Exhibition of Italian Work Abroad. The site still stands today, bearing nearly the same name: The Overseas Exhibition.

In this paper, I aim to present the site through a walking exploration, based on a series of walks I conducted there between 2023 and 2024. By adopting a geo-historical walking methodology, I intend to uncover some of the various layers of stories, memories, and forgetfulness that have accumulated in the historical strata of the site. Through the theoretical lens of critical heritage, I will reflect on the value of the place as a memory site, as well as a material, ecological, and discursive assemblage of the built and

natural environment. Additionally, I will consider it as a standing monument to Fascist Italy's colonial legacy and its lingering effects on the culture, politics, and society of present-day Italy (Ferlito 2016). Racism, white supremacist assumptions, a general erasure of collective and personal responsibilities for ethnic cleansing and colonial theft, and a sort of self-appointed absolution coexist with the visible and invisible remnants of the imperial and colonial past in today's Italy—a form of uninherited heritage that has neither been processed nor removed, but can no longer be ignored.

Lingering Colonial Infrastructure, Historical Removals, and Indifference

July 7, 2023. Another warm summer day in Naples. I left my home, located next to the old Pignasecca Market in the city center, and entered Montesanto Station, the final stop on the Cumana Metro Line. Unbeknownst to me, I was stepping into fascist-built infrastructure that radiates outward from the Overseas Exhibition. The Cumana Metro Line is, in fact, a living—and crucial—remnant of the infrastructural interventions made by the fascist regime in Naples. The metro line was constructed to connect the newly built neighborhood of Fuorigrotta with the city center, creating both an infrastructural and symbolic link between the modern urban vision that fascism sought to implement and the historic heart of the city. Past, present, and future all converge in fascist temporalities.

I had been invited by a diverse group of scholars, led by local artists and activists Alessandra Cianelli and Filomena Carangelo, to the inaugural day of their project: "The Country of the Overseas Land. Cement and Bogus Architecture: Restore the Unrestorable." I gladly accepted the

invitation, as in my four years in Naples, I had never visited the Exhibition before. On one hand, I was replicating a very Italian—and perhaps, very European—attitude that views the newer parts of cities as ugly, uninteresting residential quarters, while exalting the historical centers and old towns. But, if I was to be honest with myself, I had to admit that I was consciously avoiding a fascist landmark. I already felt uncomfortable passing by the Central Post Office and the fascist buildings surrounding Piazza Matteotti on a near-daily basis. Even more, I didn't want to witness yet another example of Italian indifference toward its—or perhaps I should say “ours”—painful fascist past.

What shifted my attitude toward the complicated heritage of fascist Italy was the lesson of the Black Lives Matter movement and their actions regarding monuments. In Italy, among the numerous local committees and wide-ranging interventions that spanned from Milan to Palermo, I was fortunate enough to learn from the work of two activist-scholar groups in Florence and Rome: Dr. Daphné Budasz, then a PhD student at the EUI in Florence, and the *Postcolonial Italy, Mapping Colonial Heritage* project she co-organized with Marcus Wurzer (2024); and the Rete Yekatit 12-19 Febbraio in Rome. These projects opened my eyes to how the erasure of Italy's colonial past was glaringly present in the streets of Italian cities, as well as in the everyday culture and language that shape society and politics in Italy today.

As my research and teaching had shown me, the very foundations of Italy as a nation-state were inescapably entangled with the idea of redeeming lands (*Irredentismo*) that were purported to be Italian, according to widely shared nationalistic claims. Fascism co-opted this political agenda with the goal of finishing

what Liberal Italy had failed to achieve. This highly problematic rhetoric still persists today, reflected in numerous monuments around the country where heroes of the Italian resistance against fascism are celebrated alongside former colonists and martyrs of Italian unification.

The Colonial Exhibition is an open wound, but also a unique opportunity to engage in cultural and memory work in the city that had become my new home—a city that rightfully prided itself on being one of the most culturally and politically connected to the other shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and one of the most migrant-friendly cities in Italy.

So visible in its gargantuan presence, the Exhibition is simultaneously invisible to many. On one hand, it can be considered a successful example of repurposing a difficult heritage site, while on the other hand, the indifference shown by visitors and local inhabitants speaks volumes about the national amnesia that characterizes Italy's relationship with its fascist and colonial past. This inherent ambiguity still present in the Exhibition is what fascinated and disturbed me the most.

As I was ruminating on these thoughts, I exited the train and was greeted by murals depicting the triumph of SS Napoli, the local football team, which covered the entire metro station. In fact, today, most people associate the site more with football than anything else, and the stop “Mostra” (Exhibition) has been renamed “Mostra-Stadio Maradona” (Exhibition-Maradona Stadium). It's quite ironic that a much-idolized football hero from the Global South, who openly supported figures like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, is now linked to a monument to Italian imperialism. Still, one doesn't need to be an expert in architecture or history to notice the distinct fascist style of the

site. A futurist reproduction of classical Greek-Roman architecture, with marble-like walls and the ever-present travertine stone—the so-called "Stone of the Empire" that characterizes most fascist construction projects—covers all the buildings, including the metro station.

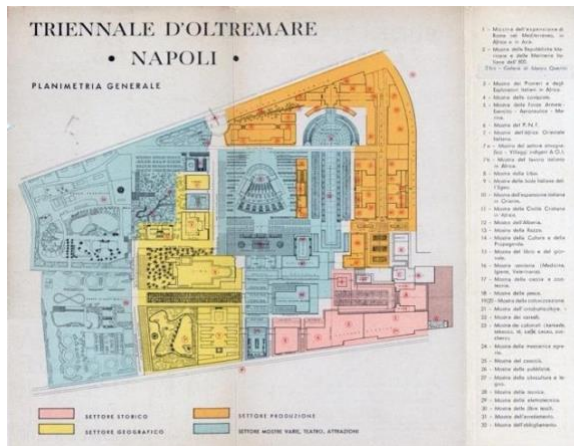
Next to the stadium, I noticed the columns standing at the entrance of the complex, surmounted by a banner reading "Mostra d'Oltremare" (Overseas Exhibition). Behind it, on a second tier of porticoes encircling the green-lawned square of Piazza Colombo inside the complex, two inscriptions—one in English and one in Italian—stood: "Love Differences / Ama le differenze." Again, the layers of erasure, rebranding, and imperial and colonial whitewashing all merged before me. While in many places in the Americas statues of Columbus and other colonizers are torn down, replaced, or re-signified, in Italy the narrative patterns of Italian grandeur, popular culture, nationalism, and unproblematic colonial history all coexist. The "discovery" of America (a term still commonly used in school handbooks and media in Italy), the exaltation of great Roman/Italian men (all of them men), the redemption of supposedly Italian lands, and Italy's imperial history (whether Roman or post-unitary) are presented together as a continuous narrative. It is no coincidence that the toponymy of the neighborhood still includes names as diverse as: via Augusto (formerly via dell'Impero), via Giulio Cesare, via Lepanto (named after the 1571 battle considered the first major defeat of the Ottoman Empire by a united Catholic States coalition), via Marconi (inventor of the radio and a notorious fascist supporter), via Venezia Giulia, via Dalmazia, and via Carnaro (territories now part of Slovenia and Croatia). The toponymy, along with the architectural and urban fabric here, as in many other parts of Italy,

still echoes propaganda aligned with the fascist, Christian-Catholic, and nationalistic rhetoric of post-World War I Italy.

Inside the Exhibition

The iron gates behind the columns were all closed. In fact, the main entrance to the Exhibition is rarely opened nowadays. So, I patiently braved the Italian summer heat and walked toward the entrance of the Exhibition area. Opposite the side entrance—just a gap in the dilapidated tuff wall surrounding the site—on the other side of the street, I recognized the lines of fascist architecture in an abandoned building, which had previously been a plant shop. It was the former station of the cable line that connected Posillipo, the upscale neighborhood along the coast west of Naples, to the Exhibition. Abandonment and failed repurposing are two key characteristics of the Exhibition and, more broadly, many areas of Naples.

Entering the site, visitors are greeted on the right by the modern pavilions of the new exhibition area. These pavilions replaced the buildings that were part of the former historic section of the Exhibition, which were destroyed during the war. Among them, the areas dedicated to the Roman expansion in the Mediterranean, the Sea Republics, Italian pioneers and explorers in Africa, and the section focused on Fascist Italy's conquests, as well as the Italian Army and Navy, were almost completely destroyed by British bombs in 1941.



Mostra d'Oltremare, Planimetria Generale, © CC BY SA Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia
 Mostra d'Oltremare, Planimetria Generale, © CC BY SA Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia
 Leonardo Da Vinci di Milano

As visitors walk alongside the new post-Second World War pavilions, they are welcomed by a natural arch made of maritime pines—one of the landmarks of the Roman landscape—while, on the left, a green lawn encircled by a peculiar stone wall is dotted with huge exotic trees, among which stands a giant magnolia. This was the former entrance to the Ethnographic Section. There, reproductions of indigenous villages from Italian East Africa were erected. It was essentially a human zoo, hosting 57 indigenous people from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Libya. They stayed on the site for only one month before being detained and subjected to the discrimination of the newly promulgated racial laws (1938). They were later displaced to the Marche region. In 1943, some of these individuals joined the partisans of Banda Mario (Petracci, 2019) and fought against Italian fascists and Nazi Germans.

It was no coincidence that the Ethnographic Section was part of the Geographical Section of the Exhibition. Just as exotic plants, animals, and architecture were showcased to the Italian

public to marvel at and lure them with the wonders of the Empire, non-white humans were also exhibited as part of the inferior realms of nature under Italian control. As less-than-human subjects (with only white people considered fully human), they were seen as belonging to the natural landscape—just as much as plants or flowers. Displaying them in this manner was integral to Italy's pro-colonization propaganda and the dehumanization agenda central to the self-proclaimed civilizing mission of European powers at large. In this respect, Italian fascism was substantially aligned with other European colonial and imperial powers. It is no coincidence that similar human zoos existed across Europe and North America (Cariou, 2016), as well as other colonial living monuments, ranging from zoos to ethnological and natural science museums, herbaria, medical and social science laboratories, urban monuments, and even private collections containing taxidermized exotic animals and stolen objects. This is what Ian Chambers (2017) and other postcolonial scholars have defined as the colonial archive.

Prosecuting west, we encountered the so-called Golden Cube. The Golden Cube is a monumental concrete building covered in colored glass-mosaic. The building was inspired by the Ethiopian imperial crown and Egyptian-Nubian temples, and it was connected to seven pavilions illustrating the seven provinces of AOI: Amara, Eritrea, Harar, Galla e Sidama, Scioa e Somalia. Nothing remains of those pavilions, and even the Golden Cube is partly covered in scaffoldings.



Inside the Golden Cube. Picture by Daniele Valisena, 2023

Looking inside the building through one of the doors, I could still see a wall painting. Although partially ruined, it was easy to recognize the figure of Mussolini riding a horse, his right arm raised in the Roman salute as he entered a non-specified African city, surrounded by a celebrating crowd. There were no plaques or explanatory signs to be found, leaving the visitor faced with an unambiguous fascist celebration. Here, one encounters one of the many contradictions where conservation, monumentalization, and memory collide in Italy. Italy has a very strict heritage preservation law, which requires buildings and monuments to be maintained in the same style and with the same materials as when they were originally constructed, even using the same techniques when possible. While this law helps preserve the cohesive beauty of Italian historical city centers and cultural landscapes, it fails to establish clear criteria for determining what is worthy of preservation and what is not. According to this law, basically all buildings older than 70 years become historical landmarks, which means they must either be preserved as they were originally conceived or allowed to ruin.

While I am not advocating for a model of constant destruction and rebuilding, like the

American approach, I believe citizens should have a say in how to handle the problematic heritage embedded in their cities. As Caitlin DeSilvey (2017) suggests, there is much to be learned from decay, and sites like the Golden Cube could serve as a platform for producing new, politically, ecologically, and culturally valuable re-signification processes. Places and monuments do not stand silent, no matter how decrepit, ruined, or protected they are; they continue to speak, willingly or unwillingly.

Exotic Others and Transcolonial Fantasies

Walking on the sparse lawn near the Golden Cube, we were drawn to a small green pond surrounded by trees. Although the surface of the water was disturbed by a small fountain spraying water in all directions, the color, smell, and the many dead leaves and branches floating on the surface discouraged us from taking a swim. Despite our reluctance, a few ducks, a group of a kind of very social turkeys, and other birds seemed to be enjoying the refreshment of the water and the shade of the trees surrounding the pond. Exotic plant species like papyrus, thujas, and bamboos still coexist with a population of local and African animals. What really caught our attention, though, was a peculiar structure on the westernmost shore of the lake. As a fellow walker explained, it was "the Castle of Gondar"—or rather, a reproduction of it. The lake was designed as a reconstruction of part of the Fasil Ghebbi, the residence of the Ethiopian emperor, which was built by Emperor Fasilides in the seventeenth century. The original complex in Ethiopia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, while the building reproduced in Naples is actually the Fasilides Baths, a small part of the castle complex.



The Lake Fasilides and the Castel of Gondar, picture by Daniele Valisena, 2023.

Proceeding north, we crossed a long, tree-lined avenue full of palm trees, which originally ran through the Geographical Section and led to the Zoo—now walled off from the rest of the open area—and the now-dismantled Botanical Gardens. In a couple of minutes, we reached the Libyan Pavilion. We were met with a few scattered palm trees standing in freshly cut yellow grass, all scorched by the sun. We could only glimpse the outlines of the former installation, as most of the buildings had been leveled by time, Allied bombings, and the various repurposings of the site over the years. At present, the area is primarily used as a storage space, with rusty oil barrels sitting next to metal scraps, broken furniture, logs, and other discarded materials. A grim present for an area that once housed fine sculptures, ceramics, carpets, and water reservoirs, all under the shade of many verdant trees. In the past, there was even a minaret, alongside buildings that reproduced Italian new towns in Libya, and a square where Berber people sold spices and other overseas products. The Libyan Pavilion used to be one of the main attractions of the Exhibition, at least in the minds of its planners. Its geographical centrality within the complex

also mirrored Libya's importance in fascist imperial and expansionist ambitions. The law of January 9, 1939, had officially declared Libya part of Italy, much like Algeria was part of France. Sites like the Colonial Exhibition served to "Italianize" new Italian lands and people, while reinforcing the othering and alleged inferiority of foreign, non-white cultures and races.

When I visited the site again in the summer of 2024, this area had been completely fenced off and transformed into a sort of *Alice in Wonderland* theme park. As strange as it may seem, this continual repurposing of the space is what allowed the site to survive the post-Second World War real estate speculation and to be partially renovated in recent decades. Unfortunately, those who wanted to visit the Ethnographic Section had to buy a ticket for the park. Despite my insistence on visiting just the historical part of the complex, the stewards explained that the lake, the castle, and the entire natural setting were all integral parts of the theme park. It was too much for me, so I gave up and stayed outside. I tried to circumvent the perimeters of the theme park, but in vain. Interestingly, Lewis Carroll's tale has been interpreted by post-colonial scholars as a representation of the British Empire's conquest of foreign lands. While I am fairly sure that the juxtaposition was entirely coincidental and unintended in the case of Naples, it is still quite telling that a fantastical world populated by strange, semi-human creatures has been staged on the same site as the Colonial Exhibition, which shared much of the same ambition. This is a striking example of how the past and memory are valued in this complex, and how unintended racist, colonial, and extractivist practices continue to resonate with one another.



The Alice in Wonderland Exhibition, Picture by Daniele Valisena, 2024.

Conclusions

Letting monuments built by fascism crumble may lead to the oblivion of these imperial landmarks. But is it the best way to approach this place? When it comes to memory and the unconscious racism that still affects a large part of Italian society, sites like the Overseas Exhibition could serve as powerful pedagogical and educational tools—places where we could critically reflect on the past and present role of fascism and coloniality in Italian and European societies. Instead, in Italy, the economic valuation and simple, anodyne preservation of heritage seem to be the leading criteria when it comes to curating heritage sites.

In this regard, it is interesting to engage with Caitlin DeSilvey's (2017) "curated decay" approach. By valuing the role of decay and ruination in heritage preservation, it might be possible to convey different meanings from the monuments and material testimonies at sites like the Overseas Exhibition. What does the rapid decay of cement (50-70 years) tell us about the imperialistic and grandeur claims of fascist Italy

and its contradictory vision of modernity? While fascism intended to rule Italy and the Mediterranean for centuries, the regime lasted just two decades. Although fascist propaganda schemes impressed foreign nations and observers, the regime's economic achievements were far from substantial.

On the ecological side, the Exhibition constitutes a potentially open museum of the imagined imperial environments of fascist Italy. What can we learn from the plants, trees, and ruderal species that have modified the curated exotic ecology planned by fascist planners? The presence of numerous alien species, now part of the familiar landscape of Italy, speaks to the deep and often invisible entanglements between local cultural and socio-ecological settings and other parts of the world. The Italian landscape is shaped by as many socio-ecologies as there are stories linking it to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. Moreover, the hybrid ecology of places like the Colonial Exhibition stands as a living example of how nature is always a space of encounter and a deeply political field. While Italy could never achieve the primacy it longed for among the other imperial European powers, the legacy of such a project survived its political failure. It is a complex heritage, made up of ominous political and cultural remnants that still shape the everyday lives of Italians, influencing some of the most problematic political and social habits of today. But since this legacy endures, I believe it is possible to engage in memory work to learn from it, and thus counter its most dangerous and unacceptable traits. Monuments speak, but it is up to us to interpret them and begin a productive educational, political, and cultural dialogue with the problematic history they bear.

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