

[LETTER FROM THE GUEST EDITOR]

Dear Reader,

This edition of *Quarterly* thinks through its feet, through a human pace, a self-propelled pace. Many artists note the creative role of walking in connecting them to the world around them, in developing their senses and sensibility to ecologies and environments. The histories connecting walking, creative practice and environment are long standing. For example the journals of the romantic poet and diarist Dorothy Wordsworth reveal the iterative practices of walking, looking, noting and responding to the natural world around her, whilst the Scottish modernist writer Nan Shepherd's work in the Cairngorm mountains simultaneously communicates embodied response to the environment and detailed knowledge of its geology and natural history.

More recently the story of land art, usually framed within discussions of sculpture in the expanded field, can be recast in relation to walking. Key works from the 1970s such as Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels*<sup>1</sup> explicitly consider the narrative experience of the viewer, seeking to engage them with the surrounding environment through the lens that the sculptural intervention creates. The work must be experienced by moving (walking) through/around/in relation to the objects. Walking art and sustainability of course do not only relate to the natural world, nor only to artists making work in rural contexts. The urgent need for ecological thinking in urban settings is clear, and the complexities of city systems and infrastructures provide starting points for artists in this edition - especially in considering interfaces between the human, the built, and the natural world.

Jess Allen's solo walking in rural England and Wales uses a 'Tractivist' approach. A neologism portmanteau combining simply 'track' and 'activism'. Allen is driven by an approach that connects her to others through the walk - it is about encounters that she has along the way; conversations, experiences, interactions with others that are activist in their intent. Allen's practice connects to an art history of rule-based work, and the extreme performances of everyday life expounded by artists like Teh Ching Hsieh and Linda Montano in the 1960s<sup>2</sup>. Setting herself the (near impossible) task of living on food that was grown, processed and sold within a walkable distance from her home, Allen reveals a stark portrait of food production in Britain today, and provides a 'score' for readers to try themselves.

Lucia Monge's *Plantón Movil* takes trees, shrubs, bushes, houseplants large and small to the streets, playing with the dual meaning of the word 'Plantón' - both a sapling and a sit-in. Here the walk-as-protest makes visible the plight of urban plants, enabling a new focus and attention on their situation. The photographs of the 'forest' moving through city streets show participants with plants in slings - tucked

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1973, Great Basin Desert, Utah

<sup>2</sup> Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance*, 1983.

in like babies at a parent's chest, or held in back-backs – an unlikely protuberance fanning out around the heads of the walker-carriers. Culminating in a temporary gathering, the ad-hoc creation of a green space in a city, Monge's project also advocates for the right to public space and nature in the city.

Sharyn Egan and Amy Sharrocks discuss the links in their work between walking and water. They worked together as part of the Perth International Festival, Western Australia, in 2018, when Sharrocks' *Museum of Water* was at Fremantle Arts Centre. Egan's *Walyup Water Walk* invited participants to follow a route through Perth's watery histories, from the dreamtime story of the Wagyl who created the Cockburn Sound, to the draining of the wetlands by the colonising British. Their conversation forefronts the importance of storytelling in landscapes and waterscapes and the potential of art to enable new relationships, understandings and insights into place.

The Maraa Collective's *Olfactory Walk of Ward 88* takes an unseemly side of Bangalore, India, and exposes it to a touristic guided walk. The processing of waste is a vital component in any system. How we deal with it reveals volumes about our societies. Maraa write of the caste system in India and the traditional role of the Dalits in cleaning and clearing excrement. Their guided walk disrupts understandings of waste, drawing to light the invisible lives of the workers whose livelihood it represents. Mierle Laderman Ukeles famously shook hands with every sanitation worker in New York City, using a gesture of interaction to signal a level of respect and an acknowledgment of their labour in maintaining the city<sup>3</sup>. Maraa orchestrate a clash of two walks/worlds; the repeated routes of the street sweepers and waste sorters with the guided tour of waste 'tourists'.

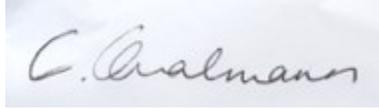
Bibi Calderaro's *Walking as Ontological Shifter* explores the potential of walking practice to disrupt our sense of ourselves as enclosed organisms, forging connections between people and their environment using conceptual and physical exercises. Using her 2018 project on Yamecah Bay as example she expounds her work to promote understanding of our place in complex eco-systems, building resilience, respect and hope through these practices. *The Land Where Fountain Avenue Begins* is a former landfill site reclaimed as public park, by walking together with local community leaders Calderaro locates the bay, the city, the history and the present moment as well as possible futures in their human/ecological contexts.

Through the artworks drawn together in this edition I want to highlight art in which the walk itself is the form that the work takes – the walk as artistic medium - presenting examples drawn from locations around the world . Whether conceived of as situation or live art event, performance or guided tour, the walk-as-art is a distinct thread within walking arts practice that holds particular potential for connecting people, place and politics. Walks activate interconnections and operate as real-world interventions whilst simultaneously fore-fronting the aesthetic

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<sup>3</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation*, 1979.

considerations of their artist creators. Walking as necessity, walking as a freedom, walking as a subversive practice, walking as performance.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "C. Qualmann", on a light-colored background.

Clare Qualmann, London, UK, April 2019

**Clare Qualmann** is an artist/researcher working across a wide range of media; from drawing and sculpture to text-works and live art events (often in the form of walks). Ongoing artworks include *Perambulator* a walking project with prams, and *East End Jam*, a walking, foraging, pickling and preserving project that celebrates the unexpected fruitfulness of the urban environment. Qualmann was a founding member of the Walking Artists Network and continues to facilitate its online presence, occasional events, and a seminar series that connects those using walking as part of a creative critical practice. She lectures at the University of East London and at London Metropolitan University where her teaching and research focus on participatory, site specific, and experimental modes of contemporary creative practice.



Photo credit: Blake Morris, 2016