

# Introduction

Walking as artistic practice has been a niche topic with cyclical levels of interest in various art worlds over the past century, with particular interest in the past few decades. Author and artist **Francesco Careri** (1966–) traces early predecessors of artistic walking’s history back to the wandering hunters of the Paleolithic period.<sup>1</sup> Such long-lasting interest, from Paleolithic times to the current moment, both inside and outside the various art worlds, makes walking a compelling topic for personal artistic practice, general walking enthusiasts, as well as teaching.

Walking disrupts conventional notions of categorization, which is partly why it is ripe for contemporary art studies, providing a path for walkers, artists, and students of wide-ranging lived experiences, hoping to connect to the larger world where boundary-crossing and critical thinking are necessary for solving the complex problems we all face in the current globalized moment. To this point, throughout this text, issues related to identity and lived experience are highlighted, including my own: I am a cisgendered white woman, and I don’t have any disabilities at the moment. I have received artistic training through institutionalized educational spaces, which has brought me to this interest in walking as artistic practice. While I have consulted with other artists and scholars on this book and worked to reduce bias, it is important to be open about my own lived experience for those considering this text. Walking is a complex topic with varying levels of accessibility, and everyone experiences it differently.

As an introduction to walking as artistic practice, this book begins with a history of walking, starting with wandering philosophers and activists, moving on to mid-twentieth-century art movements, and arriving at current day participatory and social practices. Establishing this foundational background will help people better understand the remaining content of

the book. Readers then encounter a chapter on analyzing walking works, where they will become more familiar with approaches to documentation and popular conceptual topics used in walking projects. Finally, readers will be introduced to the language used to formally, conceptually, and contextually review these works. That language is then used to describe examples throughout the remaining chapters.

The next chapters walk through various themes that frequently appear in walking as artistic practice, such as observational walking, which pays attention to sensory experience and notions of “the everyday.” Issues of leading versus following, as well as who gets to walk and where, bring with them theories of tourism, leisure, surveillance, race, gender, and disability. Further chapters examine rituals and concepts of place, where sub-topics of pilgrimages, parades, labyrinths, notions of home, environmentalism, and urban versus rural spaces all take on new meaning.

Activism has its own chapter where reenactments, performances, attire/props, and demonstrations are all reviewed. There is a chapter on connections to drawing, which highlights relationships to land art, performance, technology, and architecture. Lastly, a chapter focuses on embodiment and the meditative qualities of walking, with which non-artists will likely be most familiar.

There are appendixes providing tips and resources for various documentation approaches in case readers are new to using photography, video, or audio. There are also sample syllabi for structuring classes or workshops, as well as suggested walking readings and resources for seeking out further exercises. Brainstorming tips are included to help new artists come up with ideas. Similarly, community engagement tips are included for those who might be trying socially engaged work for the first time. Additionally, tips for travel-based walking have been added, as walking is frequently included in tourism experiences. Lastly, there is a list of different types of walking to inspire further examination of the field.

Exercises and vocabulary sidebars are included throughout the text to help engage walkers and apply the concepts detailed in the chapters. Artists, writers, and various groups are bolded on first mention in the book, and birth/death dates are included whenever possible to help contextualize the works on a timeline, given that some of the artists and writers are from hundreds of years ago, while others are still living. Indigenous artists and writers have their Native affiliation noted as available. Walking project examples are mentioned in every section, and while most of the examples could be mentioned under several of the sections, specific choices were made to help include as many examples as possible.

After reading this book, walkers should be able to create and discuss new walking works that are meaningful within their own creative practices and contexts, while also referencing the histories and creators who have come before them.