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Movement and Participation: Journeys within Everyday Environments

Johanna Hällsten

Abstract
Motion is an elementary part of our everyday life; it determines our perception and appropriation of environmental features. We are immersed in the world while on foot, grounding awareness of the three-dimensionality of the world and ourselves through movement. As a site-specific installation artist, movement is a crucial aspect of my practice in the sense that it makes the work occur. I argue that the installation comprises the experience of the participant through his or her interaction with the space and the intervention that has occurred through movement. The experience is one which unfolds and changes as the participant walks through the installation and its location. How does the encounter through movement of the work of art affect our experience of it, in particular, location- (site-) specific art work outside of the gallery? Together with this, how does the sense of narrative develop through the movements within the installation and location?

Key Words
movement, participation, narrative, site-specific art, installations, engagement

1. The First Steps
As I walk along the pavement the smell of sun-warmed conifers is unexpectedly like a wall before me. It reminds me of a trip to Italy years ago where I was walking along a narrow path next to a noisy stream, the water glistening and tumbling rapidly away from me. Yet for a moment the conifers attracted my attention; their smell was overwhelming, their warmth and moistness filling me with a feeling of content. Suddenly I was back again on the pavement leading down to the train station, to catch the 07.30 a.m. train to Loughborough. I decided to take the longer route through the park to the train station (I still had time to make the train), and walked along the path still reminiscing about the trip to Italy, not really paying any attention to my surroundings. Suddenly I found myself on the train. How did I get there, what did I pass on my way? The walk seemed so quick; where did time go? When I came home that night from work, my friend told me that there were some new pieces of art work installed in the park, just where I had passed earlier that day. How could I have missed them? I thought to myself: I will have to return another day and seek them out.

Movement is a constitutional element of our understanding of the environment we find ourselves within. Walking, cycling, driving, running and strolling through different environments changes the way in which we engage with these places. They become three-dimensional and active, and in direct relation to us a reciprocal communication and influence takes place between us and them. It is this relationship that I am
interested in, namely the importance of movement concerning how we engage with the world around us. How does the encounter through movement of the work of art affect our experience of it, in particular of location- (site) specific art work outside of the gallery? Together with this, how does the sense of narrative develop through the movements within the installation and location?

The reasons why I did not see the new art work in the park on my way to the train station that morning are many and complex. I was still a bit sleepy and let myself drift off into a pleasant memory that was triggered by the smell of the conifers. I wanted to prolong this reminiscing by walking through the park, and thus I was focused upon something specific, not leaving myself open enough to discover this new addition to the park. I became engrossed in the memory, and so the actual place subsided for that period of time. Hence the art installed in the park was not noticed; it had been missed; it was not on my agenda to look around the park itself.

It is these kinds of walks and journeys that interest me as an artist. It is the everyday walks that we take and how they are established by the movement through the specific place at that moment in time. These walks along well-trodden paths become "banalised," they allow us to meander off into our daydreams and thoughts, and as a result we become blind to that specific place and do not notice when changes happen to that place unless they literally interfere with our walk. This is why I am specifically interested in the use of locations outside of the gallery space, as it inherently presents the artist (me) with different issues to deal with, such as the way in which the location is used by the public, what its history is, where it is, etc. Coupled with this there is, of course, the issues surrounding public art. However, it is important here to stress that I am not interested in public monumental sculpture but rather in fugitive and temporal art that is in conversation with the site rather than occupying it for an indefinite period of time. The focus of this paper will thus be on the role of movement in location-responsive art and its relationship with the participants' engagement. How can art engage with the place and the participants occupying it, making the specific place "visible" again?

2. Movement and Site-Specific Art

Site-specific art has now been part of art history for a significant period of time, and as a result it has its own history and problems accompanying it.[1] It has moved from being a rebellion against the commodification of the art object in the gallery to ironically actually becoming a public commodification of the art (sculpture) in the public domain. Its manifestations range from Robert Smithson and his ideas of site and "non-site" via Richard Long, Michael Heizer and Richard Serra to Olafur Eliasson and Patricia Johanson. The focus has been on the actual history of the location and its relation to the art that is situated there, drawing attention to the art object and the location and the artist's relationship to both.[2]

As a consequence, there has been little acknowledgement of how we (the participants) move within the space and where we are arriving from and departing to. The participants' movement outside and within the location has been taken for
granted and not included adequately in the debate on site-specific art. What is interesting is how this movement determines or at least influences the way the participant encounters the art work. Where they have been before and where they are going is part of their experience of the work: they might actually only stumble upon the work, having no intention to visit the specific location at all, only moving through it to get to their final destination. In other words, there are many different ways in which the work is encountered: intentionally, by chance or not at all, to name but a few, which results in the work’s being experienced differently by different participants.

Of course this is not necessarily only the case with site-specific work but also art exhibited in galleries. However, the likelihood of stumbling upon an art exhibition in a gallery is very small. If you walk past a gallery on your journey, you make a conscious decision to enter the gallery and see the exhibition currently on display in the gallery. The intention of the participant in the everyday situation is often to visit the place for other reasons than to see the exhibited work. This then results in their experience being influenced by chance and possibly more relaxed, as they are not expecting a specific kind of art work with a specific history attached to it. (I am not speaking here of public monumental sculpture and its inherent history and ways of perceiving it.) Yet this could also be a problem, as they might not realise they are encountering an art piece/intervention. Taken by surprise and not wanting to take part or experience anything like that at that moment in time may make them “unsympathetic” to the work. However, as much site-specific art in the public domain is not very often offensive in nature, it is my contention that the former is more likely to be the case: that the participant is open and relaxed about encountering something they did not anticipate experiencing.\[3\]

Site-specific art often has as one of its attributes multiple pathways that creates more opportunities for the work to be experienced unintentionally. By this I mean the paths that lead to the work and away from it. This is not to assume, however, that the work is formed from only one piece; it can be spread out over a large area and consist of several pieces, for even when the work is inside a certain area it usually has several paths within it. This means that there is no specific way in which the participant is supposed to encounter the art work. There is no start or finish to the walks around the places; the journey taken is personal and constantly changing.

The multiple paths around the places disrupt the linearity and sense of narrative taking place in general within art exhibitions. You are given several choices of where to go next. Ordinarily in the traditional gallery situation you work your way through the rooms in a linear fashion, exiting in a particular place, most often not walking back through the rooms to get a different understanding or “view” of it. This is further stressed by the traditional hanging of the work in chronological order. Thus there is a sense of direction/narrative taking place within the exhibition. This is further highlighted by the use of room numbers and the work being displayed according to which year it was created. One way of understanding the participants’ movement in relation to the work has been through the focus
on how to place, or install, the work within the gallery space and how the objects relate to each other. Yet in this instance there is still a strong focus upon how the "viewer" walks into the right "viewing position" to see the work as the artist intended it to be seen.[4]

This then emphasises that there are points of interaction between the pieces in the exhibition, where the walking in-between is not really taken into account; it is just a means to an end. The movement by the "viewer" is only comprehended as a way to make him see the work better. To clarify further, the work is understood as complete in and of itself; the "viewer" is not needed to complete the work. This attitude stems from the history of Western thought wherein sight has been understood as the primary sense, the sense through which we perceive the world most accurately. Hence perception has not encompassed the whole bodily sensation, and as a result movement has been overlooked, and vision and seeing are prioritised within art experience.[5] It is my contention that the art work does not exist in and of itself; it only exists through the relationship with the participant.

More and more contemporary installation artists are using narrative and the way to navigate through the gallery as a way of controlling where and how the participant is walking and experiencing the work. For example, both Olafur Eliasson and Ilya Kabakov construct new spaces within the gallery space which are to be experienced in a specific way. Thus the artist is in control over how the participant moves through the gallery, and this, as a consequence, highlights the narrative qualities of the piece. In site-specific interventions, however, there is no real narrative. We find ourselves meandering around the garden/park, for example, with no specific sense of direction. We decide on which path to walk when we reach a junction, not before. Even if we choose a route beforehand, this often alters as our walk unfolds. Thus the sense of narrative is completely indeterminate.[6]

By making these multiple paths integral to the site-specific art work, there is a myriad of possibilities of how and when to encounter the work. This can, of course, result in some aspects being missed, or rather not encountered. However, the "missing" of one of the pieces does not have the consequence of the whole installation being disrupted or unfulfilled. It is my contention that the installation only exists through the relationship between the participant, location and interventions, and not through the finding of the different 'parts' of it. Instead it unfolds and comes to be through the engagement with the location and the other participants. The location is as equally much a part of the installation as the pieces that are inserted into it. The multiple paths also allow the participant to encounter or stumble upon the same piece several times but from different routes, which may result in their discovering it anew. By this I mean that they may not recognise the piece as the same one despite having encountered it before. They are thus discovering it as if for the first time once more. The difference here between site-specific installations outside of the gallery space and site-specific installations inside the gallery is that the choice of how to walk and discover the work is determined by the participant in the former and by the artist in the latter.
3. Echoes of a Footstep

We have thus far come to realize that there is an important shift taking place between the gallery-based work and the site-specific work outside of the gallery, namely that the participants' movements are more greatly emphasised outside of the gallery space and that the control over this movement is handed over to the participant rather than remaining with the artist. To further explore this we shall take a closer look at certain aspects of my site-specific installation *Echoes of a Footstep* that took place both at Birmingham Botanical Garden and Weston Park, West Midlands, U.K. in 2004. My intention with this installation was to explore ideas concerning duration, nature and "the natural," change and interaction between the two.

The installation consisted in a number of interventions into the two locations: sounds, objects, photographs and video were all placed in such a way that it was not obvious whether they were pieces of art work or part of the garden/park itself. They were blending in and, to some extent, mimicking the environment they were in, and by doing this drawing attention to certain aspects that might otherwise be overlooked in that specific place. The installation took place in the two locations at the same time and there was a relationship between the two, hence it was one exhibition. Within the locations the work was dispersed over a large area. At the same time there was no information as such about the work, no titles placed by the pieces or indication as to where they were situated. This was done to enable the visitors to make up their own route around the garden/park, walk at their own leisure and only discover the work if they decided to walk that way. Thus an important aspect of my practice concerns issues such as: the temporality of the work *in situ*, how long the participant engages with the work, and finally how (s)he encounters it.[7] I want to encourage this experience to completely involve the body, which includes the movements around the garden/park and the journeys made between the two locations, along with the ones made before and after the specific visit.[8]

This brings us to the issues regarding the relationship between everyday walks and the walk through the interventions in the garden and park. Where does the difference lie between the two, and how do my interventions into the chosen location alter or differ from the everyday walks? To begin to answer these questions we first have to establish that movement is essential in determining our understanding of the world. It is not a part that is separate from us as a thinking being. Erwin Straus draws attention to this in his essay *Lived Movement* (1952), where he outlines the importance of movement to our everyday existence.

"Motility is basic and constitutive of our existence. It enables us to make connections with the surrounding world and, through this, affects all of our sensations as well."[9]

Thus it is through lived movement that we understand depth and change. If it were not for being mobile, we would not be able to experience the installation as being in it, as moving through it. If movement were only an extension of the body as detached from the intellectual ego, we would experience the installation and the environment we are in as a thing,
detached from ourselves. Since we are always on the move in some manner, we will never find ourselves at the starting point of a movement; there is no absolute beginning. Coupled with this, there is no absolute ending either, only a continual evolving of our lives. The movements of our becoming blend into each other and by this create a continual direction. We are always directed towards something in lived movement. We are not in a vacuum; we are somewhere and thus are directed towards something. We are not moving from A to B, but from here to there with no definite end or beginning. From this we can establish that possibly the difference between the everyday walks and those within my installation is not located within movement as such. By this I mean that it is not movement itself and how it constitutes our being in the world that is different, per se. It is how this movement affects and changes the way in which the sense of narrative is being constructed and lived that is different. Subsequently our question here evolves into the following: How does the narration of this journey in the Botanical Garden and Weston Park differ from that "taking place" in our everyday walks?

4. Narration

We have to address the issue of narration in order to move our story forward. Narration is an aspect used in various degrees within visual arts, and it is a way in which to construct a sense of coherence between the different pieces shown in the exhibition. It is traditionally used to reveal the plot in a fictional story. It is the function that takes the reader on a journey through the story, arriving at the end as the author intended. I am here interested in narration not in the sense of narratology within semiotics, but in the way that is an inherent part of our life. As Paul Ricoeur outlines, "...life as an activity in search of a narrative."[10] The important factor that Ricoeur highlights in his text 'Life: A story in search of a narrator,' is the aspect of activity. Hence life is a creative activity that evolves and changes as we continue to live.[11] It implies that through this activity of creating a narrative we become able to reflect upon our lives at a later date.

A story that can be told to others has consequently been created. The succession of events taking place in our life can henceforth be understood as a narrative being continually created over time. Narration is the way in which we “join together” these events, understanding, however, that there is no real separation between the events. They flow seamlessly from one into the other. Erwin Straus bring our attention to the idea that movement is the joining aspect between these events, and since movement is continual and without a beginning or an ending, the separation between the events only takes place after the events have happened, hence upon reflection of the event.

One could to some extent compare narrative aspects of the story to the notion of composition used in the installation of an exhibition and also within the art work itself. However, composition is not an ongoing activity that unfolds; it is constructed by the artist and is final. It does not normally change during the exhibition period. On the other hand, narration is understood here as an activity; it is in the actual interaction where narration takes place.
"...the unfolding of the action implies alternatives, bifurcations, hence contingent connections, which create the feeling of surprise, essential to the interest taken by the hearer or the reader of the narrative."[12]

Here Ricoeur addresses the issue of action within the plot of the story, he focuses his concerns of narrative in terms of fiction and life and the intertwining of the two. We shall use some of these aspects here to further explain how the sense of narrative plays a significant role in the understanding of the site-specific installations outside of the gallery space. When walking through the site-specific installations, the participant is the "reader/hearer." As much as the reader can foresee certain actions, the same can be said of the "walker," but ultimately neither can fully know what is to be revealed around the next corner (or page). Furthermore, this is being influenced by the "walker/readers" themselves taking charge of the narrative -- what they add to it in the form of memories and their own historicity.

Thus there is a sense creating a narrative and, effectively, a story as one walks around the garden/park. There is a mingling of the possible narrative that is created for us by the landscape gardener together with the one we create on our own, there and then, while walking through it. Thus one could say that past and present mix to create a future story to be told after the event. The difference here between that of a story read and one walked is in the authorship. In the first instance it is the author of the novel where there is a certain ending. In contrast, the walked story is constructed and authored by the walker himself and consequently it is more fluid and indeterminate.

An important factor in narration is that it does not simply consist in adding one event to another. Rather it constructs a whole out of a myriad of different events; it binds them together and creates a new potential path for the story (experience) to take.

The intention with the interventions is to encourage a renewed and more active engagement with the environment that we are moving through, drawing attention to the actual walking within it as an equal and important aspect of the place, the installation and the experience. Walking has gone through an interesting shift in our history, from being seen as a means of thinking more clearly and of getting from A to B, to now being a favourite pastime taking place in public parks, gardens, gyms, etc.

There is still a sense of the bodily detached walker in the public park and garden.[13] We are there to look upon the many staged visual things, keeping our steps to the gravelled path. The interventions in the Botanical Garden and Weston Park were placed in such a manner that they would tickle the curiosity of the visitor to engage with the place in different ways: walking outside the paths, looking down instead of up, stopping in places with no "planned" view and dwelling over a peculiar sound. In other words, over the period of time that they spent walking around the places, visitors would create a narrative out of the place itself and my interventions into the location, intermingled with their own histories. Each
participants' walk would therefore create a different narrative within the installation. The time spent within the garden/park had a great influence on this narrative; the durational aspect is crucial in understanding how this narrative is different to that of the read story or work exhibited within the gallery space.

This is especially highlighted in the sound pieces within the exhibition. The sound pieces themselves had a particular time span and a sense of narrative and had starting and ending points that were repeated on a loop. Because the piece was looped, the beginning and end points were to some extent confused and it was difficult for the participant to determine when they had heard the whole piece. Most of the sound pieces were constructed in such a way that they played for a minute and then went silent for a minute, and this set interval was looped to continue ad infinitum. By doing this I wanted to include the silence as an equal part of the piece itself; hence the other sounds heard around in that specific place would "play" at that moment, only to be intermingled with the added sounds a minute later. Furthermore, the sounds in the piece were very similar to or could be sounds that would be naturally heard in that place. This disrupted the sense of flow and created ambiguity about whether you had heard the right thing or not. Was the sound there naturally or was it "synthetic"? And how natural or synthetic were the original sounds for that matter?

Thus because there were multiple paths to approach and hear the sound pieces, the chance of the participant hearing it when it "started" was very unlikely. Unless one spent a long time there, one would not clearly distinguish the "starts" and "ends." In any case, there are none as such. The possibility encountering the sounds from a different "angle" or rather at a different point in the sound pieces' narrative was greater than with the visual elements of the exhibition. Regularity further disrupted by the differing durations within the installation. These durations were the sounds being played with their own time frame within the durational flow of the location and in turn the participants'; the effect was that the boundaries of past and present was crossed and intermingled. One would go from being immersed in the rhythm of our walk to that of the sound pieces, to the movements of the waves and winds around us, and back again.

Another aspect that was brought to light with the sound pieces was the relationships between the different durations taking place within the installation and location itself and, in turn, the duration of the participants' walk. In effect, the narrative that was created during the movement through the installation not only had a chronological dimension but also a non-chronological dimension to it. These different dimensions were combined and pushed the narrative forward. It oscillated between being in-the-now -- of being immersed in the environment you were moving through -- to other aspects that brought one into another durational dimension. This latter dimension could be being engrossed in the duration of the sound piece or in that of your memories, only to be drawn back into the now a moment later.

Consequently, it is the temporal structures and aspects of the walk that evoke narration. What interests me here is the
opportunity to play with and disrupt the sense of a clear narrative and journey unfolding as one encounters the installation and location. The specific journeys made by the participant blend with each other to make a continuous journey that keeps on unfolding. Thus the only narrative that is taking place is the participant’s own, which is in continual change and creation, and that can only be looked at in retrospect. Hence it is subjective and particular to that person and not an objective narrative presented by the artist that the artist is in control over. This results in the story told in the intervention being narrated by the participant him- or herself.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the journey that has unfolded within this paper has led us around a path that traversed the fields of site-specific installation art outside the gallery space. It has brought to our attention the importance of understanding movement’s role in the engagement with these installations. As movement is a fundamental aspect of our way of interacting with the world, our aesthetic involvement with that world must be affected by this movement. This influence becomes especially "visible" in site-specific installations where the participant has to interact further with the work than when encountered in the gallery. There is a larger degree of active motility that is taking place; walking between the pieces is not just a means to an end. As a result of this, the aesthetic engagement is not primarily focused upon "seeing" but becomes fully involved bodily.

While on this walk around the garden/park, we created a narrative that, upon reflection, we can turn into a story. This story consists of a brief understanding of the history of site-specific art, its implications and how it differs from installations in the gallery in terms of who is in control over the participants' movements through the installation. The author of the narrative around the garden/park is the participant, with a intertwining of external factors, such as the intention of the landscape gardener, the artist, etc. The author of this text is me, and thus I have within this essay a stronger ability to determine the narrative and outcome of it. However, through creating this narrative that you have now read, there have been additions to it, namely your interpretations and historicity. As a consequence, I no longer have full control over the narrative aspects of this paper; it has crossed the boundary and become yours. Where you take this narrative further is beyond my control, and this is even more so in regards to the narrative constructed in the walk taken through my installation.

Our movements within our everyday environments are at the very core of our ability to read and walk the "images" that I have here created for you. Our understanding of the spaces within these images is based upon our movement through space as such. Thus what I am intending with my installations is to renew and make us aware again of the patterns of movements that we engage with every day, patterns that are on the move, shifting and changing their structure as swiftly and easily as the shake of a kaleidoscope, conjuring up new possible worlds and journeys to discover and embark upon.

Endnotes
I here want to acknowledge that there are a number of differing terms that have evolved out of the traditional use of "site-specific art": there are "nomadic," "location-responsive," etc. However, for the sake of this paper not becoming a discussion on the classification of art that is situated outside of the gallery space, or indeed sometimes inside the gallery, I have chosen to stick with the perhaps "old" term of site-specific. Note, though, that I tend to call my work location-responsive rather than site-specific.

Of course there have been artists that have taken this movement into account. However, the majority has not. See James Meyer, "The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity," in Space, Site, Intervention - Situating Installation Art, ed. Erika Suderberg (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), for more on this topic.

This is not to dismiss the fact that a lot of people find public art offensive in and of itself, which may account for vandalism, etc. There is often a sense that the public art work situated in their town does not relate to them and as a result excludes them from having an engagement with it in a positive way. However, I would argue that most often these kinds of responses are created by public sculpture that has been bought or funded by the local council and did not include public opinion on what should be placed in a prominent place within the community. This is an aspect of public art that is not of any direct relevance to our task at hand, especially since we are here focusing upon site-specific art that only exist within the site for a certain period of time. It is therefore not as likely to evoke such strong emotions, but I have no problem with such feelings being excited anyway.

I have here put "viewer" in brackets to highlight the inherently passive nature of the person engaging with the art work. By using the word "viewer," there is a strong emphasis on vision and consequently on the visual aspects of the art work stemming from the oculaircentric history of philosophy and art theory. Hence, I chose to use the word "participant" when speaking of a person engaging with a work of art in a complete bodily way. See Arnold Berleant, Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) for more reading on this subject matter.


"Shhh. . . " a site-specific exhibition taking place in 2004 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, U.K. A number of artists (both visual and music) had been invited to produce a sound piece in response to the gallery. To "see" the exhibition you had to collect a set of headphones attached to a little box and a map of the gallery and its many rooms. One started the walk in the "collection" room and wore the headphones throughout one’s journey around the gallery. You were encouraged to walk through the exhibition in a specific order following the map, entering the rooms from a specific point where the sound would be activated. If you entered the room
from another entrance, the sound would not be activated. Hence there was a clear narrative and linearity to this exhibition. One should hear the sound pieces in a specific order in relation to the objects displayed in that particular room. The overall effect resulted in you as a participant to a large extent giving up your control over your movements within the gallery, and in a low sense of anticipation about what you were going to encounter. You knew that it would be a room with a specific set of objects and that there would be a new sound to listen to. Yet the expectation was high if you knew the artist and previously liked his or her work, together with the sense of anticipation of what was coming next. This exhibition was interesting for the opposite aspects of what I am trying to explore here, namely how this engagement with the work is affected by movement when the participant and not the artist is in charge.

[7] Botanical gardens, and parks in general, have a rich history of manipulation and control. These are both exerted over the landscape itself and the public that visits them. As a visitor you are given a number of vistas and ways of experiencing and looking at the landscape that has been created for your pleasure. The emphasis is placed on the way that you look at things. During the walk around both the garden and the park you are presented with plenty of points to stop, stand still, and look at the view presented for you. It is like a three dimensional painting. This brings up issues of control and of nature actually not being natural; it is a "synthetic" environment being managed and manipulated.


[11] Paul Ricoeur has written a large number of essays on this topic. His interest lies in understanding the narrative aspects within both fiction and life. "Stories are told, life is lived" (1981, p.430). How can these statements cross over each other and become more in unison? Hence his premise is that stories are not set in stone and that life is more narrated than previously thought. The narrative aspect is that which brings these two statements closer. Ricoeur discusses these issues in text such as "Life: A story in search of a narrator," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and imagination*, ed. Marion J. Valdés, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991) and "The Narrative Function" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*, ed. John B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).


(London: Verso, 2001), for a comprehensive look at the history of walking.

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