

Walking Journey: Art and Montage in Three Walks

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Abstract

Walking as a scholarly subject and artistic practice has gathered significant attention in a past decade. Drawing on work of Walter Benjamin and contemporary walking art practices, the paper attempts to present a montage of Three Walks. It takes you on a journey through fragments of modernity in Berlin and Paris, the Great Wall Walk in China, and the student performance on the pedestrian bridge in Ljubljana.

Keywords: walking journey, art, *Denkbild*, montage, Walter Benjamin, *flâneur*, Marina Abramović & Ulay, performance, the Great Wall of China

PROLOGUE: BERLIN-PARIS

Heading east, waiting for a train on the platform of U7 *Gneisenaustraße* station, I was re-bouncing in my head the conference presentation due the next day. There was no mention of Benjamin in my abstract, so I was trying to figure out just how much of him I should include, given twenty minutes. This was Berlin, how could I not include him? Slowly moving along the platform and walking aimlessly, I finally stopped at the newspaper kiosk. While scanning the contents absentmindedly, the green cover of the latest issue of the *Philosophie Magazin* caught my eye. With the front cover featuring a forest path, tall trees with a sole figure, and the large title *WANDERN*. Sure enough, there it was—*Flanieren mit Benjamin* (Strolling with Benjamin) was etched in white on green (Fig. 1). One of those serendipitous moments that calls for a smile and sets the course.



Figure 1. The summer 2018 special issue of *Philosophie Magazin* in Berlin, Germany.

I did not want to rush down the stairs upon hearing the train approaching, acquiring time to wait for another. Giving trains a chance to pass by and appreciating the waiting is something I learned in Berlin and from Benjamin in particular. “When I am traveling, I lose the best part of my pleasure if I cannot wait a long time in the station for my train,” he remarked (Benjamin, 2006, p. 72). This sentiment and practice stemmed from his childhood when he was forced to stay in bed on doctor’s orders for long periods of time. He learned to develop a sense of things coming to him from a distance and cultivated the art of patience. Stations—particularly the big ones—resembled cathedrals, which for him are spaces where one supposedly contemplates. Metro stations not possessing quite such grandeur nonetheless offer an opportunity to observe spatial details and signs, as well as the fellow travelers—if not only for watching the positioning of their feet. These places also serve as an exhibition space, a historical reminder (Fig. 2). The subway station guided my presentation while also setting a course of the text in this Berlin timespace.



Figure 2. Strolling by the wall, a historic remembrance *Unter den Linden U-bahn* is displayed, Berlin. 2018.

Less than a month after the Berlin conference I find myself in Paris with my family on a home exchange. The family we are exchanging our Piran apartment with lives in the 19th *arrondissement* just across the street of *Le Parc des Buttes-Chaumont* (Fig. 2). The park coincidentally plays a prominent figure in Aragon's book *Le Paysan de Paris*, which had a huge influence on Benjamin. In his letter to Theodor Adorno he described it as a strong impact and setting point of his unfinished *magnum opus*, *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*). He exclaims, "Evenings, lying in bed, I could never read more than two to three pages by him [Aragon] because my heart started to pound so hard that I had to put the book down. What a warning! What an indication of the years and years that had to be put between me and that kind of reading. And yet the first preliminary sketches for the Arcades originated at that time." (Scholem & Adorno, 1994, p. 488).

While there is no specific mention of the *Buttes-Chaumont* in Benjamin's work save for the list of sources at the end of the edited *The Arcades project*, he discusses the influence of Aragon's surrealism in several of his texts—including an essay dedicated to it in my copy of the *One-way Street* (2009). I was rereading it while sitting on a bench of the intriguing park with a hint of a labyrinth—a cultural category Benjamin was fond of both in writing and drawing. The original cover of *One-way Street's* **1928 edition** was designed by Sasha Stone as a montage of several street signs. *Einbahnstraße* (one-way street) was in bright red outline in front of a street scene.

In later editions, such as the 2009 English version referenced here, the street signs remain the same, but the street scene is different. It shows not only the quality and endurance of the design, but the relevance of Benjamin's work for possible interpretation of contemporary cities. The book content has—like much

of Benjamin’s work—been modified over time. The montage process for him was literary never over. Stone, whose name is also on the cover of the original book edition—his name in red while Benjamin’s in white—was familiar with the latter’s innovative montage writings. He tried to capture the versatility of content while also capturing the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the time) and the limitations of possible directions in the city due to limited transport links (Metzger, 2017).



Figure 3. Information poster at the suspension bridge designed by Eiffel leading towards the temple of the Belvedere. August 2018.



Figure 4. One of the winding paths in *Parc de Buttes-Chaumont*, Paris. August 2018.

Benjamin first came to Paris with his good friend Franz Hessel in 1926 when they were both engaged in translating Proust. It was during their walks and conversations that many aspects of the *Arcades Project* were discussed. Three years later Hessel would publish his *Spazieren in Berlin* which Benjamin in his review essay described as an epic work, “A walking remembrance” (Hessel,

2016). The book has only recently been translated to English as *Walking in Berlin: A flâneur in the capital*. The classic reads like a poetic walking guidebook to Weimar era showing among others that Hessel has successfully exported an iconic Parisian character of the *flâneur* to the streets of Berlin.

The present paper is in part organized as a montage of fragments inspired by Benjamin's method in *The Arcades Project* without laying any claim to his epic scope in volume, knowledge, depth or impact; but rather referring to his practice of juxtaposing words and texts that may not be clearly related at a glance, so it could potentially unlock new insight. Throughout the text Benjamin's five fragments from the 2002 edition of *The Arcades Project* are used in color to stress that many of his notes were written on colorful pieces of paper or covered in colored cross-referencing circles squares and crosses that one can find in Berlin archives. Whenever I come across the widely reproduced black and white image of pensive Benjamin with a cigarette, the photo that Susan Sontag wrapped her essay around (Sontag, 1981), I tend to imagine the color ribbons in front of him. Though Benjamin was very fond of his numerous colorful notebooks (Rippin, 2013), the strips of paper are stuck in my mind, influenced by the 1992 Hughes film *One Way Street: Fragments for Walter Benjamin*. The riveting conclusion—with colored papers scattering on that final fateful slope on the French-Spanish border where Benjamin ended his life in 1940, wind emptying the briefcase of his unfinished *The Arcades Project*. The suitcase was never found in real life, and we have no clear idea of what manuscript was in it. Nonetheless, it remains a popular notion that it was one way or another a definite version of *The Arcades Project*.

Aside from the montage principle I also borrowed Benjamin's *Denkbild* (Fig. 3) as a working tool. *Denkbild* usually translates as a thought-image though some also mark it as Benjamin's "literary postcards" (Hansen, 2006, p. 1). Adorno (1997) described Benjamin's writings in the *One-Way Street*, as a collection of *denkbilder*, or thought-images that can't be expressed in words. In my work with students the *denkbilder* serve as a prop for brainstorming. It helps to sift through concepts and possibilities for the research and performance.

Following some reflections on walking with Benjamin in Berlin, Paris, and Portbou, the second part tackles arguably one of the most fascinating walks in contemporary art performed by Marina Abramović and Ulay along the Great Wall of China. In the third part the performance realized by students in Ljubljana unveils in what way Benjamin, Abramović and Ulay's encounter may occur in the middle of a pedestrian bridge as it were.

I. WALKING WITH BENJAMIN

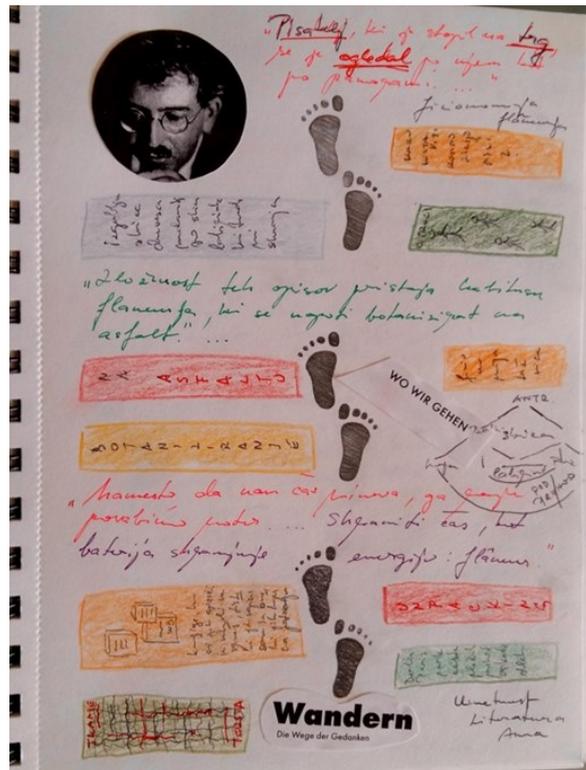


Figure 3. Denkbild Walking with Benjamin

Botanizing on the Asphalt

One day while walking in Berlin towards the station and upon hearing the S-bahn train approaching, I was about to run up the stairs to a platform when a figure of a man in a long white coat suddenly appeared in front of me—like in a dream, walking in slow motion. It was as if he worked like a magnet, slowing my pace to a near stop. I became aware in an instant that there is no reason justifying one to be running for a train, another one will simply be due in 5 or 10 minutes. There was no reason to hurry anyway. Never again have I encountered a person walking with such precise and graceful slow movement as that man, smoothing space in front of him as it were but his appearance stayed with me as a physical presence of an image rooted in the streets of Berlin. Not long after that episode I started reading Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood* with his reflections on travel and memory. The city where one among other things may learn how to wait for a train.

Train stations are not Auge's non-lieux, but places that might be interpreted as passages where the flâneur practices his "botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 372). Botanizing often referring to Baudelaire's practices in Benjamin's texts was similar to physiognomy. They borrowed from biology to describe intense scrutiny or a systematic observation, collecting flows and beats of the city. It has been referenced in the literary opus of Balzac who was

supposedly practicing social botanizing himself (Harvey, 2003). As a phrase popularized by Benjamin it has found its way into artistic practice.

We see it in the work of Nanna Debois Buhl, a Danish artist, who in her artwork *Botanizing on the Asphalt* presented “a series of cyanotype ‘herbariums’ depicting discarded objects collected on walks in Long Island City, Copenhagen, and Riga” (*Botanizing on the Asphalt*, n.d.) The visual artist was inspired by both Benjamin and the 19th century botanist Anna Atkins. Buhl produced an installation at *Charlottenborg Kunsthall* in Copenhagen and later a limited series of a book (2015) preserving the life of objects in a particular moment using a pre-photograph technique of cyanotype that raises intriguing dialogue with Benjamin’s clusters of urban objects and the auratic dimensions of an artwork in time of not only mechanical but digital reproduction.

The *flâneur*

Paris created the type of the flâneur. What is remarkable is that it wasn't Rome. And the reason? Does not dreaming itself take the high road in Rome? And isn't that city too full of temples, enclosed squares, national shrines, to be able to enter tout entire with every cobblestone, every shop sign, every step, and every gate-way into the passerby's dream? The national character of the Italians may also have much to do with this. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who have made Paris the promised land of the flâneur the "landscape built of sheer life;" as Hofmannsthal once put it. Landscape that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room.
(p. 417)

Benjamin’s *flâneur* and *flânerie* are predominately interpreted within his cultural theory of modernity and often lifted out from that historical timespace, namely the Paris of the 19th century and applied to contemporary cities. *Flâneur*—which directly translates to loafer or stroller in French—in Benjamin’s work is indeed historically and spatially rooted in Paris and associated with the work and personality of Baudelaire; although the reading that excludes all other dimensions appears too narrow and reductionist. Walter Benjamin’s work is not limited to Baudelaire and Paris, though.

In terms of literary references Benjamin acknowledges Balzac’s renderings of the *flâneur*, but reads *flânerie* also in Proust’s descriptions of urban impressions that much resemble his famous memory trigger when eating madeleines, for instance. There is also Benjamin’s Marxist critique of capitalism

through positioning the flâneur in the market, warranting further reading and interpretation. Memory and dreams were topics explored by Benjamin throughout his work. The considerable production of research testifies that the character and the practice exhibited in 19th century Paris may be applied to contemporary urban spaces in new and intriguing ways (see for instance Tester, 2015, Hansen, 2006, and Harvey, 2003).

In contemporary art practices many artists are highlighting serendipity and eclecticism (Boutin, 2017) of contemporary urban spaces not necessarily referring to Benjamin rather borrowing the *flâneur* to engage in an art walk. Others however may draw directly from his work, such as those artists included in the Jewish Museum's 2017 exhibition in New York—*The Arcade: Contemporary Art and Walter Benjamin*. It also featured a catalogue by the same title that includes 36 artistic interpretations of Benjamin's 36 topics from the Arcades as well as archival material and reproductions of Benjamin's handwritten notes. As it appears, Benjamin remains a strong point of reference for various interpretations of contemporary urban spaces. This is in part due to his sound cultural critique and on the versatility of his styles of writing.

Of getting lost on a walk

In description of his first memories of *Tiergarten* Benjamin tackled the art of getting lost in a city:

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks. (Benjamin, 2006, p. 53-54).

While I regularly get lost in cities by using a standard map (the North is always in front of me no matter which side I face) and walk in the opposite direction of where I want to arrive, I gave up the need to be at a precise place in Berlin. Picking up a *bezirk* (district) was enough a choice that after which I had no exact idea where I was going. Surprisingly, it enabled me not only to pay attention to details but to feel free to reflect on Benjamin's fragments of city sounds, layers of memory, and dreams. Admittedly, I have never quite mastered the Benjamin way of getting lost.

The city is only apparently homogeneous. Even its name takes on a different sound from one district to the next. No-

where, unless perhaps in dreams, can the phenomenon of the boundary be experienced in a more originally way than in cities. To know them means to understand those lines that, running alongside railroad crossings and across privately owned lots, within the park and along the riverbank, function as limits; it means to know these confines, together with the enclaves of the various districts. As threshold, the boundary stretches across streets; a new precinct begins like a step into the void—as though one had unexpectedly cleared a low step on a flight of stairs. (p.88)

What does walking with Benjamin entail?

Walking with Benjamin means engaging with both known and unfamiliar parts of the city in a dialectic of images and narratives with shifting perspectives required by new readings and experiences. Walking with Benjamin means strong convictions are an obstacle. He described his use of quotations as a wayside robber who leap out armed and relieve the stroller of his conviction (Benjamin 2007, p. 38). With Benjamin one must be prepared to be relieved of one's convictions during a slow walk, botanizing on the asphalt like the *flâneur*, and unpacking the library like an archeologist. Walking with Benjamin means getting immersed in literary space as you converse with old and contemporary literary figures in a labyrinth...all while playing chess with Brecht!

The last walk as a remembrance and an art performance

Many friends and relatives have urged Benjamin in 1940 to leave Paris. He was offered a flat in London by his ex-wife and a ticket to the USA by Adorno. While he finally decided on the USA, he was extremely reluctant to give up his work on Baudelaire in Bibliothèque Nationale. This delay in leaving fatefully influenced his last trip. He was guided over the Pyrenees with a small group of other refugees through the rough terrain as they walk in precise time measurements—a ten-minute walk and one-minute rest—due to his weak heart. He carried with him a briefcase that he didn't want to separate with. Reports say he still possessed his good sense of humor at that time, cracking jokes along the way, collapsing only on the last steep slope where he had to be dragged by two other members of the group. He arrived in Portbou completely exhausted.

The group has registered with the Spanish police and has been informed that despite the USA visas they won't be allowed to proceed to the port in Portugal as they didn't carry French exit permits. This was the last straw for Benjamin and on that night after writing a letter to Adorno that was destroyed by the person who promised to deliver it along with a manuscript, he took a fatal dose of morphine; he was 48. The next day the Spanish authorities allowed the rest of the group to continue their journey and they all of them finally made it to

the USA.

In 2007 the seven-kilometer path in Portbou, Northern Spain was cleared and marked as the Walter Benjamin Memorial Walk, financially supported by several international institutions. The path was reconstructed based on the testimony of other refugees and the guide of the Lisa Fittko group (Walter Benjamin Hiking Trail, n.d.). Dani Karavan, an Israeli sculptor, has created a series of passages that one goes through to reach a simple stone grave of Walter Benjamin.

Some visitors commit themselves to the whole stretch of the walk from France to Spain, while others walk only from the town of Portbou through the passages. Group walks are organized integrating art performances, including literary readings and music along the way. A multimedia application is also available for individual walkers. Aside from guided tours that include art, individual artists have made their performances—such as the Korean-born Japanese artist Shino Yanai who walked with a white torch (Fig. 4) as a reminder of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. She traversed from and to Portbou and included burning installations at the beginning and the end of the walk.



Figure 4. Shino Yanai performing a torch walk on the Walter Benjamin memorial path. Still of the artist's video (Yanai, 2017).

Benjamin's last passage is also dramatically narrated in Hughes's 1992 film *One Way Street: Fragments for Walter Benjamin*. Though for obvious reasons, the path does not feature as it was not cleared yet at the time.

From 28th to 30th of September the third Walter Benjamin summer school will take place at Portbou reflecting on his Marxist though paying tribute also to the anniversary of Marx himself. Aside from Marxist scholars several artists will participate (Pasatges Cultura Contemporania, n.d.)

The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward-if not to

the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time of a childhood.
(Benjamin, 2006, p. 416)

Reflecting with Benjamin at Les Deux Magots

While most scholars describe him as a Marxist philosopher, cultural critic, literary scholar, and writer, I often perceive and read Benjamin as an ethnographer working in archives and writing notes in coffee shops of Berlin and Paris. In one of his vignettes entitled *Labyrinth* he is describing an afternoon in a famous literary café *Les deux Magots* in Paris where he was waiting for someone—he couldn't later recall who—and was suddenly struck by a clear image. It was somewhat a revelation of visual connections among his relatives, friends, and lovers...he drew a picture resembling a set of trees that included the most important relationships in his life. He later lost that piece of paper and could *never* reconstruct it. The closest he came was a drawing of a labyrinth where the one word sits at the top: anthropology. It is one of his friendly writings with which one feels invited in, like when he is unpacking his library and we find ourselves among his boxes of books chatting away.

Last August 2018, *Les Deux Magots* was filled with tourists with local and constant traffic noise as well as high-end shops all around. It is rather difficult to imagine Benjamin sitting here...at least outside. Inside the scene is calmer not so rushed, locals reading their free newspapers and waiters for some reason less hurried than outside. The two Chinese figurines (Fig. 5) inside testify to the history of the place – it used to be the silk shop and when converted to a café it kept the figurines, hence the name that pertains to the figurines but also to the popular play at the time of *Les Deux Magots de la Chine*. I sit here with my notes of the Great wall walk wondering how Benjamin would perceive the contemporary performance art – the art that cannot be re-produced. Are we to understand it as quintessentially auratic in Benjamin's elementary sense of the aura: the here and now of the work of art?



Figure 5. Les Deux Magots de la Chine, Paris. August 2018.

II. THE GREAT WALL WALK

In 1988 artists Marina Abramović and Ulay performed their famous art piece *Lovers* (Fig. 6) by walking the Great Wall of China—Ulay going from the direction of the Gobi Desert, Marina from the Yellow sea—meeting in the middle after three months at the place of three temples. The original plan was to walk for a year, then 6 months, at the end it was three because of money, permit restrictions, and parts of the Wall simply being officially off limits. Each one walked 2500 km of what was described as “spiritual journey” and “personal drama”. It was a film-like ending of their personal and artistic relationship (Abramović and Ulay 1989).

The Yugoslav-born Marina Abramović and the German born Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) met in Amsterdam in 1976 when Marina was performing one of her Rhythm pieces, cutting a five-point star¹ onto her stomach with a razor blade. Ulay nursed her wounds after the performance thus marking the beginning of one of the most symbiotic art relationships that lasted 12 years. In 1970s they performed series called *Relation works* that are now included in art textbooks, in which they explored space, time, and movement as pertaining to the male-female relationship by applying extreme body hardship. Some of their remarkable performances were walking and running naked into each other with force (*Relation in Space*), running into mobile columns (*Expansion in Space*), sitting

1 Five point star was a recurring theme in her performances as a political sign of a Yugoslav state that she used to work into a contested narrative of her presumed oppression and self-orientalizing discourse.

with their back to each other hair braided together for 16 hours (*Relation in Time*), driving the car in circle inside a museum for 365 laps creating a circle (*Relation in Movement*). Between 1981 and 1987 they performed a series of 22 performances. *Nightsea* crossing was the first crack that signaled the coming breakup of the personal and artistic relationship. The piece had them sitting for seven hours at the time in different venues, dressed in various colors, fasting and completely immobile staring at each other across the table. At a certain point towards the end of this performance Ulay couldn't endure any longer so he got up and was taken to the hospital due to an extreme loss of weight while Marina stayed at the table.

The Great Wall Walk was first envisioned in 1983 as another endurance performance that would culminate in artists getting married right where they meet on the Wall. However, complex political circumstances of China in 1980s meant that the organization of the walk took five years before all the permits were obtained. By that time their relationship had deteriorated to the point where they decided to do the Walk not to get married but to say goodbye.

In *Ways of Walking* (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008, p. 3) Ingold and Vergunst suggest the ethnographic approach to the study of walking by drawing on phenomenological tradition. They proposed the researchers should consider how people prepare for a walk, how they set out, how they carry on, and how they arrive.

Not being a witness² to the Great Wall Walk I rely here on the ethnographic reading of the existing written and video materials, treating data as an archive evidence and partly as informant statements in recorder existing interviews. It is presented in a short cut.

Preparing

HER: Went to the gym every day to get fit for a walk. Refused to be involved in any practical material preparations, didn't care about the equipment but wanted to know who is going to wear what color. Reading Taoist poetry.

HIM: No exercise beforehand, reasoning he will get fit while walking. Completely preoccupied with tents, food, torches, shoes, water bags ... Couldn't decide which color to wear. Reading surviving in a desert manual.

Setting out

HIM: May 1988. The Gobi Desert. Flat, dry. Hardly any signs of the Wall,

2 Johnston (2012) proposes that the Great Wall performance as it wasn't witnessed by a formal public speaks to a "secondary audiences" (p.19) thus making a discursive experience possible.

disintegrated or used by local peasants to build their houses, encouraged by Mao at the time of Cultural revolution.

HER: May 1988. The Yellow sea. Imposing parts of the Wall remaining, dynamic landscape, high climbs.

Carrying on

HIM: Getting immersed in local culture, peasant life, searching for a family, a sense of belonging. Significant conflict when denied participation at a local dance. Extrovert. Embracing the landscape with the people in it. Commentary on the positive aspects of Chinese communism. Comparing a walk with the wholeness of childhood. Walking dressed in blue, completely covered.

Title of walk writing: *The Wall. The Walk. The Alien.*

HER: Immersed in mythology and local storytelling. Not interested in local life, deeming it ugly. Insisting on walking till complete exhaustion. Combining poetry and dragon stories, narrated walk.

Commentary on the transformative nature of the walk, including references to Chinese mythology embedded in the Great Wall narrative.

Introvert. Appropriating landscape for inner strength.

Walking in red and black. Balancing a walking stick.

Title of writing: *Boat Emptying. Stream Entering.*

Arriving

HIM: Picking a white flag. Surrender, he laughed.

HER: Picking a red flag. Crying.

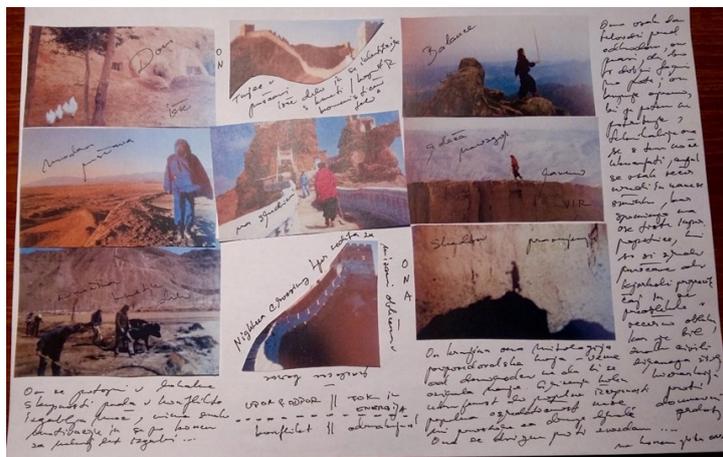


Figure 6. Notes on Lovers.

After the separation

After the Great Wall Walk, the artists took a markedly different path. Ulay withdrew completely from the public, returning to his original interest in photography. Marina went to perform more theatrical pieces and steadily attained world fame.

Ulay met a Slovenia artist and moved to Ljubljana where he lives overlooking a Dragon bridge. *HIC SUNT DRACONES*.

22 years after the Great Wall Walk Marina & Ulay met at MOMA in New York—at the retrospective which included their joint work—where Marina performed her most famous piece to date: *The artist is present*.

III. WALKING ON THE BRIDGE

In September 2017, a performance entitled *Frog-ments* was carried out by a group of postgraduate students from the Faculty of Tourism Studies, Turistica. It was a semester's worth of work in the Sociology of mobile cultures course. The performance took place on the Butcher's pedestrian bridge in Ljubljana—one bridge down from the Dragon bridge—and was part of the *European Heritage Days*. It proceeded with this lead topic: *Water from Myth to Architecture*.

After the introductory lecture on Sociology of mobile cultures at the faculty, all consequent lectures were delivered *in situ*, i.e. in a cafe by the *Butcher's bridge*. The initial *Denkbild* (Fig. 7) was organized around a vector of a bridge to include the flows, directions, authors, and concepts that some students were already familiar with or were about to read. Benjamin, Bauman, and Lefebvre were on the previous course reading list while Simmel—his text on Bridge and Door (1994)—was new.

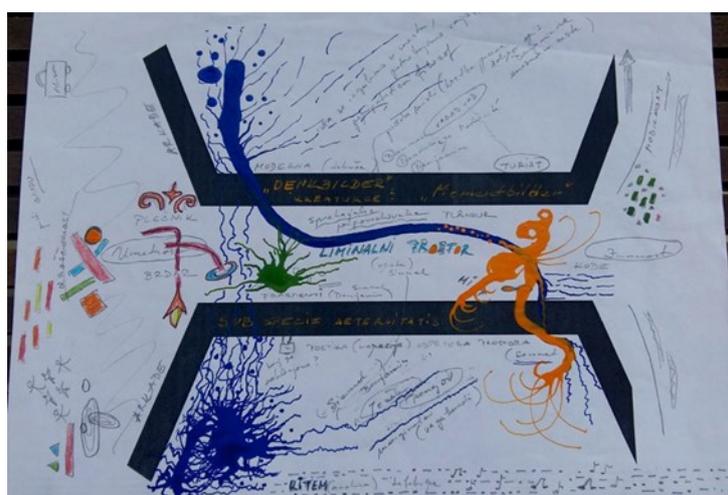


Figure 7. Denkbild Bridge

Drawing on Benjamin's clusters of *objects* (bridge, colonnade, sculptures,

statues), *topics* (art, tourism, heritage), *figures* (the stroller, the tourist, the lover), and *authors* (Plečnik, Brdar, Kobe) was a continuous process of selection and juxtaposition of urban fragments as they present themselves in material, narrative, and imaginary.

Two architects based in Ljubljana were invited to give short lectures on their view of the bridge. With the first architect we took a three-quarter of an hour trip down and up the river via a tourist boat (which was conveniently moored below the Butcher's bridge). With the second architect we discussed the bridge and the life on it from our standard cafe.

After lectures students would engage in their fieldwork and choose their own schedules. Thus, we have all—in our own time and way—went “botanizing on the asphalt” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 372).

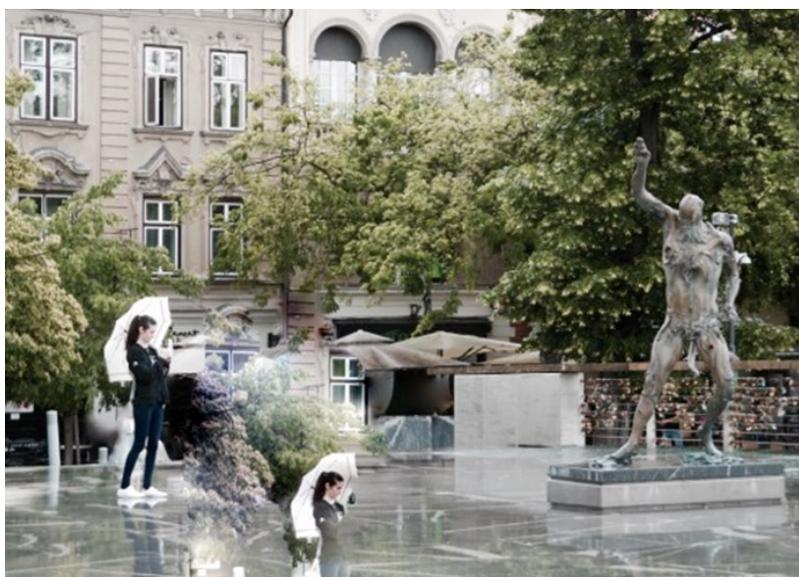


Figure 8. A double on the bridge with Satyr.

A passage from L'Eternite par les astres- "The number of our doubles is infinite in time and space...These doubles (Fig. 8) exist in flesh and bone-indeed, in trousers and jacket, in crinoline and chignon". (Benjamin, 2006, p. 362)

Frog-ments: (artistic action)

On the day of the rehearsal it was raining so we sat in a cafe waiting for the rain to stop. While reading through the ever-changing script deciding on the lines and noises of the *artist, researcher, architect, her 1* and *her 2*. We also watched the clip from the famous performance by Marina Abramović, *The artist is present*, and decided that the question “Are you present?” should be included in the *Frog-ments* performance along with two picnic chairs.

The bridge was vacant after the rain, truly resembling a stage. It is the most

difficult to perform on a stage that no one perceives as a stage, but a public space. Not an agora anymore. It was a clear and sunny day after a long spell of rain on the day of performance. Two hours before noon we busy ourselves by preparing balloons, placing Benjamin's fragments—translated to Slovenian—inside the balloons so that pedestrians will find them later when the balloons lose their breath. Lively discussion and laughter captured the attention of tourists at nearby tables, so we explained the event (some even later joined the performance).

The bilingual poster with the text “Are you present?” was tied to the railings along with colorful paper ribbons with Benjamin's fragments. Two chairs were placed in the middle of the bridge at the railings. Serendipitously, a street musician arrived a few minutes before the start of the performance. As if hired by our group, he started to play his guitar thus providing the musical background for the entire performance. Each of the participants decided which fragments of lines and sound to use based on the live situation on the bridge: the artist conversing with the sculptures, the architect looking for its bridge, the researchers writing notes, the characters uttering questions and sounds, bewildering pedestrians crossing, and tourist watching.

All the balloons were handed out or placed on the Satyr and on the rails. After the group decided that they are out of sounds and lines the performance was concluded. Once hugs have been exchanged, students departed to another location to have coffee where they met by chance the elusive artist Jakov Brdar, the creator of four monumental sculptures at the bridge (Prometheus, Satyr, Adam, and Eve). They told him about the recent performance on the bridge and offered him a balloon for good luck. Brdar refused as he “doesn't want to be lucky” but accepted the script of the *Frog-ments*. The students recalled it as a perfect fragmented day.

For three days after the performance—each at a different time—I would come by the bridge to observe what happened with the objects we left on the bridge (the “Are you present?” poster, balloons, and paper fragments). The balloons were all gone in a day, the paper fragments were disappearing slowly (one or two at the time), while the poster was a bit more resilient. Some people were glancing at it, some frowning, some taking pictures, some apparently completely lost in thought in front of it (Fig. 9). The wind would tear the first and then the second string, making the poster flap until on the fourth day it was nowhere to be seen. Whether it was collected by the cleaning crew or slid down into the river floating towards the Three bridges was not observed. But for those three days, it was present.



Figure 9. Children observing passing boats through glass part of the bridge.

Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again. (...) Every childhood discovers new images to incorporate them into the image stock of humanity. (p.390)

Post scriptum (Post-script)

For the 50th edition of *Barcolana* – an international sailing boat regatta in Trieste, that will take place in October 2018, Marina Abramović was invited to design a poster (each year a selected artist is invited to do that). Marina dressed in black Mao style outfit is holding a white flag with a slogan: WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT (Cascone, 2008).

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