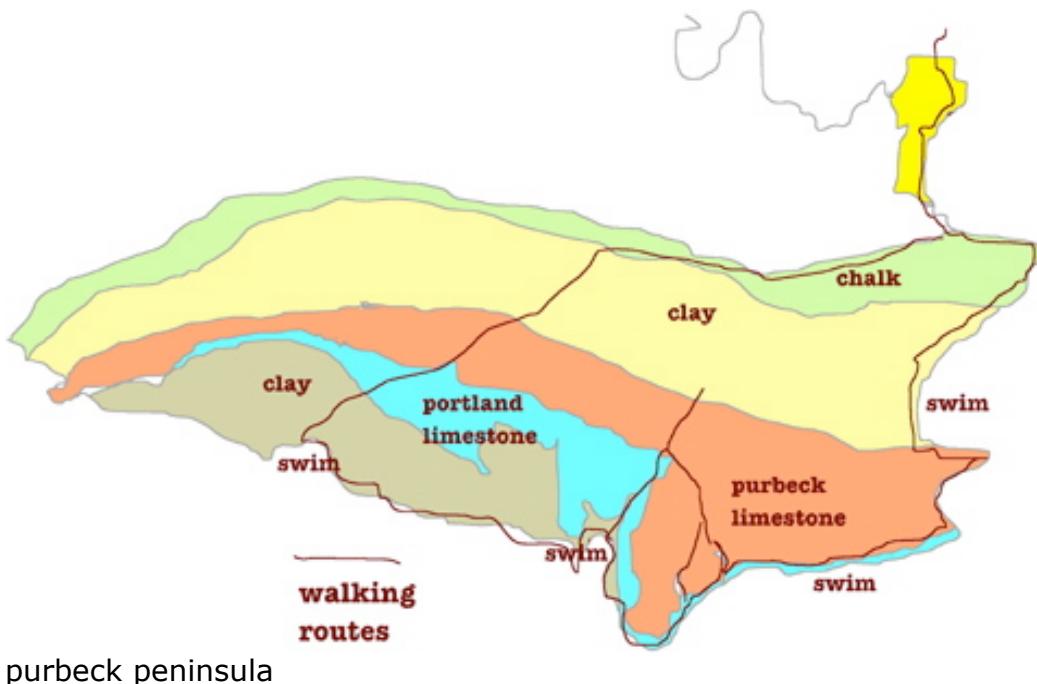


An Essay

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that folds into a memory of walking on chalk paths



This essay is a walk, is about walking. Walking as a simple and basic human activity. I wanted to reflect on and interweave my physical experience of walking, with my reading on certain philosophies of Henri Bergson (note a), on time and memory. At the same time, I re-visited the work of Landart artist Richard Long(note b), because it seemed to link the concept and the physicality of walking so beautifully. As a dancer, walking is dancing is walking, they become more and more the same. I write about walking because it is what everyone knows, does, it is so close to life, and it brings the situation of dance into an elemental form of being alive. I am writing with a layer of personal nostalgia, a layer of theory and a layer of observational art and I am writing as a walker, as a physical being, as a dancer.

worth matravers purbeck limestone

Walking along the cliffs in Dorset summer 2006, I return to my childhood territory, and to my many and various walks there over the years. This time I

walked several days along the Isle of Purbeck (note c), covering a whole area of coastline from Kimmeridge bay to Shell Bay. I wanted to simply walk, but also to observe. I realised that this simple action, this simple reoccurring event in my life was full of potential, of happening, of movement. I decided to reflect along the pathways I know so well, to reflect on how my memories weave through the steps I am making as I go along, how the repetitive action and rythym of walking transforms over time and distance, how it affects my perception of space, of time. I wanted to observe how the landscape and ground underfoot shifted my conciousness and sense of body and physicality.

seacombe bay portland limestone

There are layers of history along these coastline cliff paths, as in all paths; A geographical history, a social history, a personal history. Layers of movement, erosion, transformation, memories, walking, stumbling, falling.....and all the time new layers created. These paths remind me of the processes of change, that are movement, life. But also about how my present walking and my layers of memory are in a dynamic process together. Each time I walk along a known route, it is in one way a repetition, but still never the same experience.

*the days in which one is living
the coming and going which one is
doing
anything one is remembering is a repetition
but existing
as a human being
that is listening and hearing
is never repetition.
it is not repetition
if it is that which you are actually
doing
because naturally each time
the emphasis is different*

Gertrude Stein(*)

I have used Elizabeth Grosz's book The Nick of Time (2004) to read about Henri Bergson. His ideas on time and memory have influenced/are influencing many philosophers and artists. They affect me too, because what he proposes resonates deeply with my experience of how I am in time. I took these thoughts along the cliffs. I walked with the memory of them in my walking, and now, I am writing with the physical memory of my walking. According to Henri Bergson, past and present are not varying degrees of the

same thing but two entities that co-exist. Action holds us in the present, it is what we are doing and living. He argues that the past is a condition of the present, an active part that can be regenerated and revived in the present.

"The present is that which acts and lives, that which functions to anticipate an immediate future in action. The present is a form of impending action.....The past is that which no longer acts, and although it lives a shadowy and fleeting existence it still is, it is real. " (1)

There are clear moments when I am walking past a certain spot and I remember another moment, from yesterday or ten years ago, when I was walking past that spot. There is a strong sense of past memory and present moment co-existing. I re-walk the memory, I re-create the memory, the memory creates my present moment. Those places too, that you always pause to watch the view, each time the same spot but at the beginning of the day, the end of the day, on a sunny moment , a dark windy moment, with a sense of familiarity and uniqueness at the same time. In such a place, in such a moment, Bergson makes sense, the theory becomes alive.

dancing ledge portland limestone swim

Bergson talks about two types of memory, habit memory and memory proper. Habit memory is everything to do with learning things, remembering how to walk, spiral my body, balance, read, use a map. It acts out the past in the present, it is lived and is action-based. In this way it tends towards the immediate future, because it is interested in getting something done.

Memory Proper, on the other hand, is when the attention is pulled away from the present, or is in a state of relaxation. To Bergson, the past is a 'fugitive', accessible only by turning away from the present. Memory Proper is past orientated and is interested in what happened in a specific place, a specific time, a specific situation.

Bergson calls the past 'virtual'. It exists, but in a state of latency, virtuality. He believes that there is an act of disconnection necessary, in order to access the past, that we must take ' a virtual leap' from the present and a move into the past. It is fascinating that Bergson shifts our idea of the past being inside us, to the idea that the past is outside us and we are in it. We have to detach ourselves from the present and place ourselves in the past. In this way the past is not just a passive backdrop to our lives but it can still influence the present and it transforms itself over time. This act of disconnection is intriguing. When the ground under my feet demands my attention, when I am walking fast, negotiating tricky parts I am engaged more physically, I am totally in the present situation, have little chance for reverie, but when the walking is easy, the path known, it seems there is time/space for my mind to wander, to remember things 'proper', as I go along. Often I dance in a state of immediacy, moving onwards in time, but I can dance inclined to the past.

I then do not grab the space, do not rush through it, but I move in it, allow it to open up behind me. My focus becomes peripheral. I hear more, feel more, remember more. And Grosz explains Bergson;

"Yet habit memory, the impulse of the past to pre-figure the present in terms of what is familiar to it and already accommodated by it ,with its focus solely on the present and imminent future, that is, with its orientation always to adaptation, drives away, overpowers the more languid process of reverie or reminiscence needed to summon up or actively enter the sphere of the past that is recollection." (2)

Still, this state of relaxation that Bergson talks about is not a physical relaxation, memories seem to touch the present at unexpected moments. I have different levels of being and attention as I walk, and each with a different body/space/time relation. I can be busy with my breathing or my physicality or I can be focussing outwards, observing things around me, or I can be engrossed in my thoughts, imagination. It seems memory can be part of any of these. Bergson;

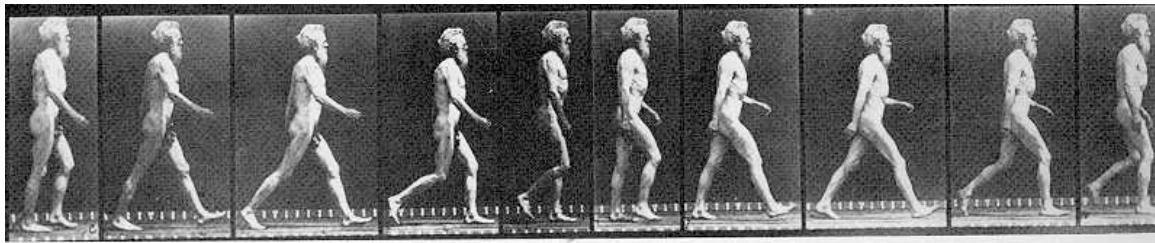
The present must be understood as elastic, capable of expanding itself to include what from the past and immediate future it requires to remain in continuity with itself (3)

chapman's pool clay fossils swim

Taking a step back to the beginning, to 'walk'. In wikipedia ;

to move on the feet by alternatively setting each foot forward, with at least one foot on the ground at all times. (4)

Walking (note d) is the basic action of all land mammals, of all human beings. It is how we get about, transport ourselves. Walking is maybe the simplest action in which we can sense our body moving, feel the anatomy and the energy and the movement. Also it is the simplest form of connecting in movement our bodies to other objects, to the ground, to gravity, to be aware of how we are negotiating the space and the things around us, that we are moving in. In all its simplicity it presents the complexity of what it is to be a moving body, and particularly a dancer. Eadweard Muybridge (note e) was fascinated in the movement of animals and humans, of deconstructing the continuous action. By splitting up and sequencing into parts, photographs, Muybridge creates an animation of walking. Still, there remains the essence of the continual flow within these frames. The body memory of walking seems to fill in between the frames. I can superimpose myself on them and walk through the frames, a continuous line, two versions of walking, two versions of time.



Muybridge walking (5)

Brian Massumi (2002) writes, *when you walk, each step is the body's movement against falling- each movement is felt in our potential for freedom*

st. aldhem's head purbeck limestone

There is something in this simple repetitive action that is pure rhythm, pace. This rhythm and pace affects perception, highlighting a dynamic connection between perception and movement. Thinking of the relation between stimulus and response, Grosz (2004) considers Bergson's idea that in the more complex living beings, there exists a delay or 'uncertainty' between the perceptual reaction and the motor response. Bergson claims that the bigger the delay, the more unpredictable the response, and therefore the greater the freedom, greater the consciousness.

" ...*the brain is not the repository of ideas, of mind, of freedom of creativity. It stores nothing, it produces nothing, it organizes nothing. Yet it is still that which partially explains or conditions the possibility of innovation, creativity, and freedom in so far as it is the means by which a delay is interposed between stimulus and response, perception and action, a capacity for re-routing, re-organizing the perceptual-motor circuit.*"

" *The brain functions, in Bergson's conception, not to produce images or to reflect on them, but to put images directed from elsewhere, from the world, into the context of bodily action.* " (6)

Bergson implies that perception always inclines us to the future, that it is only because of the rift between perception and its future motor action, that this orientation to the past is possible.

" *Movement and action drive the memory-image away, but equally, perception and action in the present gain their liberty, their capacity for innovation in the future through the unexpected intervention of memories which enable this present to be cast in an unexpected light. The present is fractured or nicked only by the past.* " (7)

I shift and think of Richard Long's (note c), A Walk of Four Hours and Four Circles in the mid-nineteen-seventies on Dartmoor;

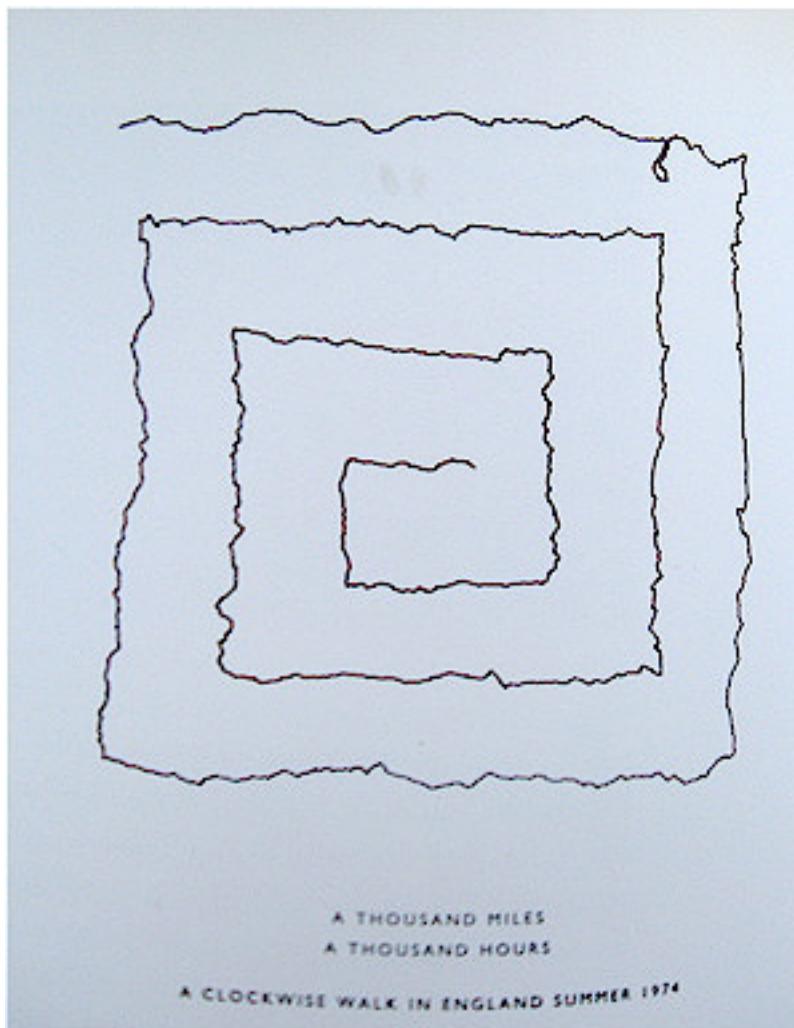


This work was about the acceleration of pace and about changing perception. Walking the inner circle first, he walked each circle in one hour from very slow to very fast. In Long's walks, time is a consciously employed element. By setting the four circles, time functions as a formal element. He seems to play with the tension between measured time and duration; duration relating to perception, walking pace and walking rhythm relating to perception.

old harry rocks chalk

If I walk fast I am more in my physical body, I am alert to my body negotiating the ground, rocks, clay, sand underneath my feet, I feel my breath, my heart, I concentrate on the activity. I am aware of moving forwards, of passing things that are still, of traversing ground. If the weather and sea are wild, I am pulled into the immediate present and future. If things are calm, if I wander calmly, I have more time to observe, to notice the sea, colours, sounds, trees, rocks, textures. Like Long's One Hour 1984, a one hour circle walk on Dartmoor, which becomes a circle of observations finding their way into words. " Many of the observations are directed towards the ground; grass, heather..... There are observations of colour, blue, brownish, yellowish; of sound, sounds underfoot, breath, of water moving; of

the conditions of the terrain, bank, pool, downhill, slant; of weather....The richness is all there, in the circle of words" (8).



Long 1974

It seems Long employs consciously this physical level of walking with the observational level. He does not talk about memory, but more of the freeing of the imagination, the thinking while he walks. But the memory, the past is always there. It makes me curious what Long's experiences are during walking. If he was in Nepal, if he had past recollections of moments when he was walking on Dartmoor. Having walked in so many different places all over the world, how do his past paths, past walks and actions interweave. R. H Fuchs (1986) implied in his writing about Long's work that his art works extended over the whole world, so that we can see his work as one long continuous walk. And he is still walking.....

.....that somehow having the dynamic relaxation of walking many hours each day puts me into a state of mind which frees the imagination.

Quite often I get ideas for new works by doing a walk. In other words one walk leads to another.... (9) Long

" Perception can never be free of memory and is thus never completely embedded in the present, but always retains a reservoir of connections with the past as well as a close anticipation of the imminent future. The present is extended through memory into the past and through anticipation into the near future. " (10)

This idea that the present, the future, the past is all here and accessible and forming a dynamic whole, gives a completely different outlook on life than if one experiences them as separate from each other. Simply that the past is alive, not a passive archive.

Of Long's spiral walk in 1974, Anne Seymour (1991) writes '*being a spiral, the work occasionally passes, at a distance, places where the walker has passed before. The work is an accumulation of many sensations and memories; it is like time itself, ... his work becomes more and more an accumulation of time, of moments, hours, days, nights, weeks.*' (11). A play between time, distance and duration. Bergson too recognized time and duration as different concepts. For him, time was something that can be divided and measured but duration, he saw as a continuum, a dynamic flow of transforming sensations and affects.

" Sensations are always in continuous variation: the continuity of a sensation does not simply extend it in time but transforms its quality. Numbers, the measure of magnitude, are always by contrast, constant and discontinuous. " (12)

shell bay blown sand swim

If I walk, without stopping, between two points along a path, the path marked out on the map and by signposts along the way, is a parallel path to my sensation of walking, to my experience of body, space, time. Two maps over each other. Zeno's arrow illustrates the difference and also the connection between time and duration. It also illustrates the distinction between passage and position. From Brian Massumi's book, Parables for the Virtual (2002);

"when zeno shoots his philosophical arrow, he thinks of its flight path as a linear trajectory made up of a series of points that the arrow occupies one after the other. The problem is between one point and the next, there is an infinity of points between. Of course, it is the nature of infinity that you can

never get to the end of it. The arrow gets swallowed up in the transitional infinity. Its flight path implodes. The arrow is immobilized. Or, if the arrow moved, it was because it was never in any one point. it was in passage across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of points; it is a dynamic unit. That continuity of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed. It doesn't stop until it stops: when it hits the target." (13)

Bergson argued that points or positions often appear retrospectively, that space is a 'retrospective construct'. For Bergson, positions emerge out of movement. Position is movement residue. If I look at the map of where I walk it is a spatial construct, something that can be measured, divided and composed of points. For Bergson, this was a stopping of the world in thought. Thought disrupts the continuity of the world's movements and we are then looking at only one dimension of reality. So when I am walking, my map is one dimension of the walk, it stops my walking in thought?..... however the walk is also a dynamic event, is an experiential route, and that is another dimension of reality, is duration. And in this way, and according to Bergson, duration is a constant state of becoming. Muybridge's sequencing of walking is also a Zeno's arrow. In my dance I am aware of the dialogue between transit and arrival.

ballard down chalk ridge

If I stop walking, then I seem to merge more into the landscape, to be closer to the state of tree, rock. On the cliffs, I tend then to look out to sea, to the horizon, to the view. I sense my body in stillness in relation to the movement around, waves, birds, wind through grass. If I am still I sense more strongly the movement around me, rather than when I am moving through and over a seemingly inanimate landscape. There are different ways of connecting to the terrain and to connecting activity with space and time, whether on the cliffs or in the dance space.

I like to see art as a return to the senses Long (14)

Dance is a continuing return to the senses, an ongoing renewal of the senses, a memory of the senses and a re-recognition of the senses as the source of movement.

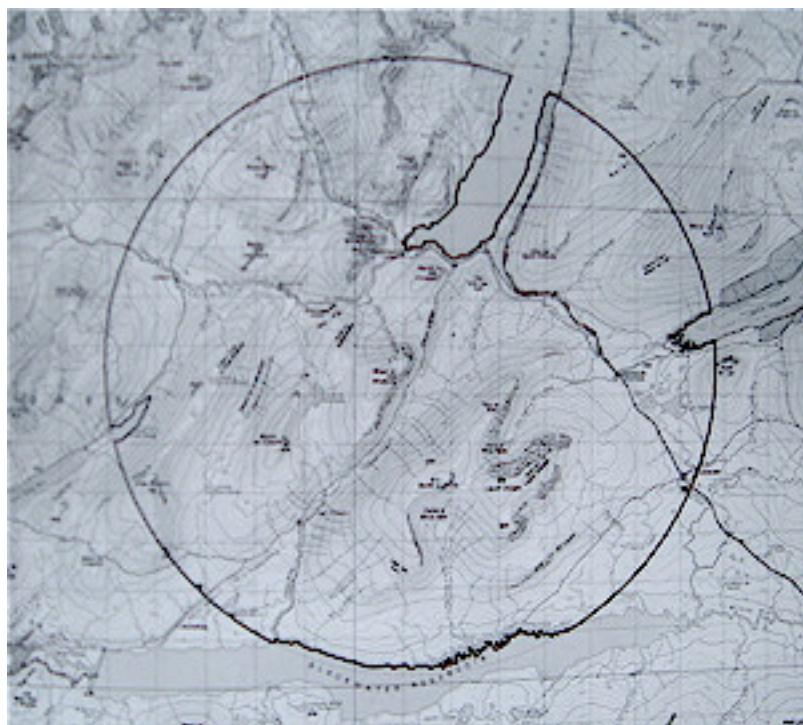
In dance however, where is the path? It is not visible, and yet it does exist. The path unfolds as you move along it, it is being danced into existence, it is an ongoing process of recognition and re-invention. It involves both habit memory and memory proper. The sense of walking over a path or dancing along a path is very powerful and specific. As Fuchs (1986) says ;

"A path has a powerful energetic force- it marks a line of movement, a moving continuum between two places conditioned by the length of the path, the nature of the terrain and the relative speed of the walker.....

The idea of the path or way has meaning in all cultures from the most material to the most spiritual. It is both something real and something symbolic.....

The important thing about a path is the movement and the nature of the track. Every path has a mysterious sense of purpose about it, deriving from the traces of the energy of its making and the withdrawn presence of that energy." (15)

What is also interesting about Long's walking is that he is very specific what the path is. Sometimes he uses established paths, but mostly he superimposes his path over the landscape, like Ten Mile Walk, 1968. He places the accent on distance, on time, or as in Low Water Walk 1980 on the intersections/crossings. He plays with the idea between landscape and path, between material and movement.



Low Water Walk Circle, Long 1980

Walking on chalk, limestone, sand, clay, across the geology and geography of where I grew up, I am drawn again to the layers of reality under my feet and to the material. As I pass a bunch of flowers left on the cliff-edge, a victim of the eroding cliffs and a careless moment, I am directly confronted

with the path itself as a dynamic changing entity. I was brought up with tales of accidents, of re-diverted paths and disappearing parts of the coastline. The more recent decision in certain places to abandon the fight against erosion, seems to be a recognition of the nature of what cliffs are, what the force of the sea is. These coastline paths are on the edge. They are on a boundary between land and sea, a boundary that is not fixed, but forever changing, forever in a process of transformation. As I walk I am part of the process of erosion. Erasure and impermanence are also strong aspects in Long's work. His location works of stones, mud, water and the fact that over time they are disrupted, changed, destroyed, swallowed back into their surroundings, is in itself a reflection of how nature is.

kimmeridge bay clay swim

Cliffs are a drastic cut between land and sea. I like this idea of walking along the edge, one side of the edge in fact. Below the cliffs, when the path takes me down to the shore, I can swim over, through, in the boundary. A more gentle transition between land and sea, where land emerges into and out of the sea. It is a crossover area, where paths do not exist, where there is only movement, where erosion and creation of new forms powerful. The fact that I can adapt walking to swimming, and move from land to water gives me a stronger sense of the nuances of an unfixed, changeable boundary.

tilly whim caves/quarry portland limestone

To bring this walk to an end, a pause, a rest, it is Brian Massumi, the opening lines of his book (2002), that seem to capture what it is to feel alive. And it is both dancing and walking that recognizes and confirms the basic and complex sense of existence.

" When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves and it feels. In fact it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels and it feels itself moving. " (16)

" In time, for the body is matter, matter is in the present, and, if it be true that the past leaves there traces of itself, they are not traces of the past except for a consciousness perceiving them and interpreting what it perceives by the light of what it remembers. This consciousness retains the past, enrolls what time unrolls and with it prepares a future which it will itself help to create. " Bergson (17)

durdle dor chalk



WALKING LINES ALONG THE FOOTPATH

Richard Long, walk in Nepal

Literatuur

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- 17 Henri Bergson, in a paper, titled 'soul and body' in the Mind-Energy magazine 1921

notes

a Henri-Louis Bergson was born in 1859 and was a major french philosopher, influential in the first half of the twentieth century. His four principle works were 'Time and Free Will' in 1889, 'Matter and Memory' in 1896, 'Creative Evolution' in 1907, and 'The Two Sources of Morality and Religion' in 1932.

b Richard Long , Landart artist 1960s 70s 80s, born in Bristol, studied art at St Martins School of Art, London from 1966. He has walked all over world, creating art works out of materials, walks and words on location and in gallery spaces.

c The isle of purbeck is a peninsula in the county of Dorset, England. The geology of the isle is complex. The northern part is Eocene clay, but where the land rises to the sea there are several parallel strat of Jurassic rock, including Portland limestone and the Purbeck beds. A ridge of Cretaceous chalk runs along the peninsula creating the Purbeck hills, part of the southern England Chalk Formation which includes Salisbury Plain, the Dorset Downs and the Isle of Wight. The cliffs here are some of the most spectacular in England and of great geological importance, both for the rock types and variety of landforms.

d From www.wikipedia/wiki/walk; Human walking is accomplished with a strategy called the double pendulum. During forward motion, the leg that leaves the ground swings forward from the hip. This sweep is the first pendulum. Then the leg strikes the ground with the heel and rolls through to the toe in a motion described as an inverted pendulum. The motion of the two legs is coordinated so that one foot or the other is always in contact with the ground. The biomechanist Gracovetsky argues that the spine is the major agent in human locomotion. He bases his conclusions on the tragic case of a man born without legs. The man was able to walk albeit slowly on his pelvis. Gracovetsky claims that however important to wellbeing, the function of legs is secondary in a strictly mechanical sense. Legs enable the spine to harvest the energy of gravity in an efficient manner. The legs act as long levers that transfer ground reaction force to the spine. Lumbar motion during walking consists mostly of sideways rotation. Gracovetsky observes that fish use the same lateral motion to swim. He believes the mechanism first evolved in fish and was later adapted by amphibians, reptiles, mammals and humans to their respective modes of locomotion.

e Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) was a photographer. He is known for his early use of multiple cameras to capture motion and his zoopraxiscope, a device for projecting motion pictures that pre-dated the celluloid film strip that is still used today.

* quote by Gertude Stein, source unknown. Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was an American writer and prominent in the avant garde artistic and literary world of her time.