

The daily practice of map making

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*If at the end of your life, you could look at the shapes your wanderings over the earth have made, what patterns would you see? What words might be formed that take a human lifetime to write?*¹

I do not consider the drawing of my life more important or more interesting than anyone else's. I want to record mine because it is mine, as the accident of my birth makes me a Londoner, whether I like it or not. I do not even consider my act as art because an artist makes it. I have made this practise part of my everyday life through action, the tool of the performance artist.

For this is an act, or rather, it is the turning of my wanderings into an act. Or rather, it is the framing of a certain sort of consciousness about my everyday life around an act that I already practise. I say a certain sort of consciousness, not because I know everything about what that consciousness is, but because I am aware that as a practise of everyday life, it is fluctuating, transforming, evolving.

Unlike the *thought* of transcribing everywhere you go, the *act* of it is multiple. I carry my GPS wherever I go. I could draw with it, as others have – indeed as I myself have, but this is not within the main scope of my practise. I wish to record not only wherever I go but also by inference, how I learn about the (almost exclusively) urban environments I wander in.

¹ Extract from performance lecture '*Unfallen*' commissioned by Arnolfini Art Centre Breathing Space programme and performed in Bristol, Manchester, Gent, Helsinki, Sydney and Perth to date.

My initial thoughts were constellated around writing. What would you spell out if you could see the path of all your journeys? As soon as I turned this question into a practise, that of noting my first journeys in Berlin, it became clear that journeys very rarely conform themselves to any form of western script (an acquaintance I met in Prague and to whom I showed the pattern of my wanderings across that city, having knowledge of Arabic, said that she thought she could almost read something in it). However, flowing, loopy, regular, spaced western letters, like the ones you are looking at now, are almost impossible to make out in the interrupted, linear, skittish and reiterated marks that wandering a city inscribe.

In describing the nature of these marks, I am aware that I have revealed a hint of the rules I apply to this practise. My desire, like all everyday practises has shifted. From starting out with the wish to catalogue every trip I have made, to read the story of my life, to see my personal map, written by my aging body through time and on the surface of the earth, this drawing that takes a lifetime to make; I now wish to transcribe knowledge as well.

I was born in London and apart from my three years' study in Nottingham in central England; I have lived nowhere else until I began to divide my time between Berlin and London in 2001. My mental map of London is a very deep one. It not only represents thirty-odd years of pacing, but all the accumulated event and knowledge written into those locations. I talk here about the mnemonic aspect of cities. That experience of walking down a familiar street and that action prompting memories of past conversations that happened there, thoughts that were thought there, atmospheres or smells or experiences that although dislocated by time, are located spatially. These aspects of personal history and accumulation fascinate me; they are the material of my lecture demonstrations that consist of my solo performance practise.

In 2001 I began to experience Berlin and became painfully aware that all those accretions of experience and knowledge were of no use in the mnemonic map of this new city (if such a thing exists outside of one's own experience). I knew I was at the start of a process and I knew how complex and rich a process it was because of my London experiences. Like London, Berlin is a city that eludes easy mental mapping (I wonder now if that is what I look for in a city). With London, this has to do with scale and its fragmented areas. Londoners like me, think of a multiplicity of Londons, when it comes down to it: dozens of loci; villages, they are sometimes called, perhaps ironically, perhaps to highlight the parochiality of this sort of attitude. Berlin's difficulties derive from its constant radical evolution, from divided city with its reputation as the counter-culture capital of Germany on the West side and the profession of its Hauptstadt der DDR (capital of the GDR) status on the other, through what some might call the obliteration of the East by the West after the fall of the Wall, to its re-investiture as capital of Germany and the massive paradoxes this entails. Berlin is a city that eludes because of all the distorting mirrors through which one is forced to view it, its longing to be a world city, the foisting on it of the new flagship of Germany just at a time when Germany is reeling from its first series of recessions after the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 50s and 60s. It eludes you finally if only because no one can agree what its middle is; westerners considering it Zoologischer Garten and easterners Alexanderplatz (the modern, politically correct answer would have to be the Brandenburger Tor although the geographical textbooks state that it is the rotes Rathaus, as if everyone knew that).

For all the mourning of the redundancy of my London knowledge when it comes to being in a new city with this old head, I knew that I am also being offered an opportunity, to chart with Berlin what I was denied with London: to record how I physically come to know a city.

And so these drawings are not the portrait of the city as I *want* to see it, they are the portrait I have traced with my body since I began to chart my every movement in April 2003; the re-iterated lines, the everyday journeys, the summertime excursions and the escapes from its boundaries, one body in the millions of bodies that make up the software of this city.

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