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PROPOSITIONS FOR WALKING RESEARCH

Sarah E. Truman and Stephanie Springgay

Walking as an artistic and participatory practice is re-emerging in various disciplines, including its intersections with social science and humanities research methods and methodologies (see walkinglab.org). Some of this interest stems from the fact that walking can be an embodied and sensory way of enacting research. In this chapter we discuss how walking as research also begs the question of the “*how* of research;” we speculate on how rather than simply a mode of moving from place to place, walking engenders what Alfred North Whitehead (1978) refers to as propositions.

We use the concept of propositions to examine the productive potential of walking research within two artist groups: a community arts walking practice in Canada organized by the Hamilton Perambulatory Unit (HPU), and a contemporary art walking project in the United Kingdom facilitated by Barbara Steveni, founder of the former art collective the Artist Placement Group (APG). When walking is understood as a proposition, subjects are not given to experiencing movement, space, walking, etc. in any pre-determined or already realized way. Walking becomes stripped of its own assumptions.

Whitehead (1978) states, “A proposition is a new kind of entity. It is a hybrid between pure potentialities and actualities” (pp. 185–186). Propositions draw from actuality as well as propose what *could* be, they are “tales that perhaps might be told about particular actualities” (p. 256); in that regard a proposition can be seen as both actual and speculative. According to Whitehead, propositions are either true or false—they either conform to the world order or do not conform (he was, after all, a logician and mathematician). But unlike classical philosophers’ views of propositions, in Whitehead’s work, *Process and Reality* (1978), he asserts that even *false* (non-conforming) propositions offer “novelty” that can “promote or destroy order” (pp. 186–187) and provide alternative potentialities for those whoprehend and feel them; as Whitehead states, “it is more important for a proposition to be interesting than it to be true” (p. 259). Even a non-conformal proposition’s “primary role” is to “pave the way along which the world advances into novelty” (p. 187). Propositions do not give information as to how they function in concrete instances but gesture to how they could potentialize; allow us to feel what may be; in that regard, propositions are “lures for feeling” (p. 25).

The chapter unfolds with an exploration of propositional thinking related to walking research and questions about the compatibility of the notions of intercultural arts and non-binary thinking. Following this, we use propositions in two ways in this chapter. First,

as linguistic statements about what walking as a research practice *can do*, along with a discussion of the two contemporary walking groups. Second, we envision the act of walking as a proposition—a hybrid movement and *lure for feeling* that can *pave the way along which the world advances into novelty*.

Proposition 1: open space for novelty

Erin Manning (2013) discusses that a proposition is immanent to the event, not external or separate from the event, but co-constitutive. As Whitehead (1978) shows, a proposition’s “‘lure for feeling’ is the final cause guiding the concrescence of feelings” (p. 185). Accordingly, propositions describe how events occur—it is through “feeling” that new potentialities are actualized within an inherited context. Once these potentials are actualized (in an event) new propositions immediately emerge (creating a new hybrid between actual and speculative), and the pattern continues: “[e]vidently new propositions come into being with the creative advance of the world” (p. 259). Propositions follow propositions follow propositions. But not in any linear or causal way. Although propositions follow propositions, this following is not pre-planned or determined.

Manning (2013) asks how techniques become propositional (as opposed to instructional). Walking the streets of Hamilton Ontario “becomes a proposition when it begins to exceed the technical, making operable a kind of bodying that is unforeseen (unpracticed) but available from within the register of the movement that will have preceded and followed it” (p. 78). This shifts walking’s relationship to research. Walking, we will argue, is not a habit of movement external to the event of research, nor simply an embodied way to feel in space; rather, it is the event’s becoming. In a Whiteheadian sense, feeling is not a reflective act but an “intensive felt interval of the between” (Manning, 2013, p. 79).

While the central arguments of our chapter are concerned with the implications of propositional thinking for walking research methods, we also want to address a tension between our approach to propositional thought and interculturality—the theme of this book. Interculturality seems rather paradoxical given that most arts practices are contributed to by varied sources. Jonathan Hay (1999) offers three definitions of intercultural: contact between cultures; what happens in the space between cultures; and the hybrid nature of any given culture. He notes however, that when culture is approached as a noun, rather than an adjective, it reifies binaries and thereby reinforces issues of power and privilege. Similarly, art scholar Laura Marks (2000) conceptualizes intercultural cinema as that which is produced in the interstitial space between belonging—a kind of transnational, diasporic, nomadic art practice. Her scholarship is Deleuzian and speaks to the visceral and haptic materiality of film, and thus resonates with our approach to walking. However, interculturality, it would seem is a complex if not problematic concept. In thinking propositionally, we want to open up the concept of interculturality to *difference*—not as occurring between entities but emerging through *events*. Another way of thinking about this is through Karen Barad’s (2007) work on entanglements. According to Karen Barad (2007) “[e]xistence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (p. ix). Rather than inter-action, Barad speaks of “intra-action” which, “*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*” and asserts that agency is not something that someone (usually human) possesses, but emerges through mutual entanglement (2007, p. 33). As such, entangled practices are *productive*: “different intra-actions produce different phenomena” (p. 58). When discussing propositional thought, Whitehead (1978) states:

The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it takes flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation . . . Such thought supplies the differences which the direct observation lacks.

(Whitehead, 1978, p. 5)

In thinking-walking propositionally, we posit how walking research *could be* and what it *could do* by taking a speculative “flight of an aeroplane,” through propositions and then viewing walking events with different perspectives and of course new propositions. If thinking-walking research is intra-active, then propositional relations precede *relata*, which then alter and change phenomena. Propositionally, properties are no longer embedded in individuals but are emergent features of entangled productions.

Proposition 2: de-familiarize your body

Walking has been a staple of art practices since the 1960s in sculpture, conceptual art, performance and social practice. Contemporary examples include work by Simon Pope, Diane Borsato, Jess Dobkin, Rebecca Belmore, Terrance Houle and Marlon Griffin who deploy movement as an embodied critique of spatial conditions in which walking is an evocation of memory and political action (Springgay, 2011). Similarly, throughout history countless writers and philosophers, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Virginia Woolf to Matsuo Basho, have used walking to explore the relationship between movement and thought. A current example of walking and writing is work by American poet and professor Harryette Mullen who recently published *Urban Tumbleweed* (2013) wherein her 366 Tanka poems represent “a year and a day of walking and writing” in Los Angeles (Mullen, 2013, p. viii). Walking also provides a way to open up the non-visual senses, finding ways of knowing and communicating through movement, and helps to de-familiarize everyday actions. Many current walking groups draw from walking practices developed by psychogeographic artists, theorists and writers who have experimented with walking and various forms of de-familiarization since the 1950s–1960s. Guy Debord (1955) explains that psychogeographic walking practices can help “express not subordination to randomness but total *insubordination* to habitual influences” (p. 17). While practices of de-familiarization through walking vary—from the Situationist International practice of “derive,” to urban foraging, to sensory mash-ups like synesthesia walks—many walking aesthetic projects possess the common theme of using the situated, affective responses of participants when walking to de-familiarize the habitual.

According to Rosi Braidotti (2013), de-familiarization occurs through “experiment[ing] with new practices that allow for a multiplicity of possible instances—actualizations and counteractualizations . . . different lines of becoming” (p. 140). De-familiarization requires us to rethink and re/move what has become habitual, and to re-evaluate or upset common opinion; de-familiarization is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari would call “de-territorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 356). In literary theory, de-familiarization is the act of presenting common or familiar tropes in new or unfamiliar ways in order to broaden a reader’s perspective. The notion of pedagogy is implicit in de-familiarization in that there is an active effort to change a perspective. This can be as basic as wanting to enhance perception of a familiar situation, or it can have more radical aims. For example, many social movements based around walking, such as the *slut walk*, have used de-familiarization to destabilize both walkers’ and onlookers’ perspectives and draw attention to social injustices that have been normalized by prevailing social discourses. Jack Halberstam’s (2011) work on failure and refusal is another

way to think about de-familiarization beyond simply moving outside of conditioned habits. De-familiarization as a refusal entails a form of performative disengagement. By disengagement we do not mean the typical use of the term in education, whereby students become disinterested or lack attention. Rather, as a practice of failure, disengagement is an act of unwillingness or a willfulness to refuse the choice between refusal and affirmation (Ahmed, 2014). In the slut walk example, intra-active difference shifts our understanding of the walk as that which celebrates, reclaims and embraces “slut,” and “threatens the male viewer with the horrifying spectacle of the ‘uncastrated’ woman and challenges the straight female viewer because she refuses to participate in the conventional masquerade of hetero-femininity as weak, unskilled, and unthreatening” (Halberstam, 2011, pp. 95–96). While there is an ethos guiding propositional attempts at de-familiarization, it is impossible to predict what the outcome of de-familiarization will be other than proposing that eventually what is de-familiarized will too become “familiar,” and require de-familiarizing interventions, or become re-territorialized and require further de-territorialization (Ahmed, 2006; Guattari, 2013).

Proposition 3: mix the senses. Use touch to describe smell

An urban art collective, the Hamilton Perambulatory Unit (HPU) hosts public walks in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, an old steel and manufacturing city that is currently undergoing an artistic revitalization (<http://hamiltonperambulatoryunit.org>). Members of the HPU meet regularly to walk through alleys, along the Bruce Trail to waterfalls, through graveyards, and around the city’s gentrifying downtown. The HPU’s oldest member is 70 and the youngest is nine. The HPU’s walks generally include some kind of enabling constraint (Manning, 2013), where participants confine their perambulations to a designated neighborhood and/or explore a specific artistic notion, proposition, or sensory investigation while walking. The enabling constraints act as pedagogical prompts; for example, during the synesthesia walk offered in the Hamilton Farmer’s Market, participants mapped their experience on an existing blueprint of the market by using the literary device synesthesia. Synesthesia is a literary device wherein the writer uses words associated with one sense modality to describe another, for example “piercing warmth.” On the HPU walk participants were instructed to note the affective experience of what they “smelled” by using a linguistic descriptor from a different sense modality.

Literary synesthesia is a kind of de-territorialization of both the senses and language and is often employed by poets who wish to convey an affective experience. According to Brian Massumi (2002) affects differ from emotions and are pre-linguistic. He states, “the skin is faster than the word” (p. 25), yet also discusses how language can amplify or dampen the intensity of an affect through articulation or writing. Such a viewpoint does not reduce linguistic communication to a representation of affects, but recognizes words as vectors in the affective encounter, or as another part of the feeling-event across bodies from which material experience arises. In the case of the synesthesia mapping, the linguistic merging of sensory experiences enacted a de-territorialized map of the Hamilton Farmer’s Market, or de-familiarized “sensory ethnography.”

Sarah Pink (2009) understands sensory ethnography as practices in which the ethnographer “attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds, materiality and sensoriality of the environment . . . multisensorial embodied engagements with others [and] with their social, material, discursive and sensory environments” (Pink, 2009, pp. 24–25). Although it is called “sensory” ethnography, Tim Ingold (2000) troubles the five-sense sensorium as the basis for a universal system of codification and proposes, that eyes, ears and noses “should not be understood as separate keyboards for the registration of sensation

but as organs of the body as a whole, in whose movement, within an environment, the activity of perception consists” (p. 268). In such a view, the senses also form a zone of indiscernibility. The HPU’s Synesthesia Market Walk deliberately ruptured the five-sense sensorium by employing synesthesia to “record” affective experiences during the walk. The ensuing “data” from the process, rather than reproducing the market as forming boundaries based on pre-existing spatial attributes, generated maps based on scents—which were more than scents. They were “more than” (Manning, 2013) scents in that they were not isolated smells such as “grass” or “lemon” but rather the synesthetic entanglement or coupling between affective sensation, moving body, language, and space.

Writing about the relationship between water and place in the context of Australia and while working with Indigenous communities and collaborators, Margaret Somerville (2013) notes that traditional points on a map confine space because “they are contrary to a sense of local country defined from within experiential and relational knowing” (p. 75). In her research a collaborator noted that lines on a map “hem people in” (p. 75). Synesthesia as de-familiarization “involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives” (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 88–89). De-familiarization shifts the practice of walking from humanist ethnographic orientations—such as lines, points, place names—to one in which the categorical divide between body/place, human/nature is displaced with a new kind of radical transversal relation that generates new modes of subjectivity. De-familiarization becomes a “crucial method” in learning to think differently (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93). As a practice of de-familiarization, the HPU’s peripatetic meditations question how to enact a sense of territorial vitality without drawing boundaries between points.

De-familiarization as a proposition of walking enacts what Deleuze and Guattari (1994) call “geophilosophy.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, thinking takes place in relation to the earth, which means that thought is always a process of “becoming-earth.” Geophilosophy emphasizes that the assemblages, connections, and multiplicities between phenomena (human and non-human) take place on a “plane of immanence,” which is open to ceaseless transformations and experimentations. Geophilosophy emphasizes the ontology of the earth as complex processes of stratification, of flows and folds, of the “now here” of matter. To emphasize the interaction of the human and non-human in terms of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “milieu” plays an important role. A milieu is the site, habitat, or medium of ecological interaction and encounter; akin to their notion of multiplicity, a milieu is open to transformation on the basis of its supple boundaries and alterable relationships. Milieu develop, grow and change together within continuous intersecting processes of becoming, which are constituted through relations of alliance that are articulated in terms of particular milieu overlapping with other milieu. For example, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) suggest an analogy between artistic monuments and the territory marked out by birdsong. A bird’s territory, or milieu, cuts across the territories of other birds and other species. Its song, resounding beyond apparent boundaries, generates “interspecies junction points” (p. 185). The HPU’s synesthetic walk abandons reductionist and universalist approaches to creating and representing space, and allows for unending variables (of subjectivity and place) to arise in relation to the human, non-human and various other components in a given instance. Urban psychogeographer Tina Richardson (2014) uses the term *schizocartography*, which she draws from Guattari, and states that it “enables alternative existential modes for individuals to challenge dominant representations and power structures” as they walk through urban space (p. 140, emphasis added). Because Guattari spends most of his book trying to “minimize the use of notions like *subjectivity*” . . . as a “transcendental” entity that is “impermeable to concrete situations,” and in keeping with a post-human and new material perspective, in our use of schizo-geography, individuals, and their subjectivities

do not pre-exist spaces/places and affective intra-action but are produced through intra-action in a zone of indiscernibility (p. 23). From an affective perspective, space is produced socially and bodily, in conjunction with other bodies, objects, social conventions, smells, sounds, texts and relations that are “always in excess of a transpersonal capacity” (Thrift, 2004, as cited in Beyes & Steyaert, 2011, p. 52). In the case of the synesthesia market walk, the market’s territory is remade through attending to scents. Myriad scents cut across the territories of other scents—non-human objects, the word, the map, and the walkers are de-territorialized and the space or place of the “market” is produced through affective engagement. Guattari (2013) views affect as a “hyper-complex object, rich with all the fields of potentiality that it can open up . . . loaded with the unknown worlds at the crossroads of which it places us” (p. 186). For Guattari (2013), rather than affect being a raw feeling; it is a kind of hyperlink to new possibilities and always already in excess of personal capacity. As Timon Beyes and Chris Steyaert (2011, p. 53) state:

Instead of returning to a phenomenological stance that sees the corporeal as a stable basis of human experience, affect instigates us not so much to look at representations and significations as to engage with the intensities and the forces of organizational life, an event across bodies from which sensible experience emerges.

This returns us to Whitehead’s propositions where we feel first and cognize afterwards. Affects are contingent on a variety of human and non-human actors. In such a view, bodies of participants and researchers are not fixed, but partially materialized through environmental factors—and also have the potential to affect their surrounding environment. Springgay’s (2008) research into the potential of inter-embodiment, materiality and arts education, Anna Hickey-Moody’s (2013) approaches to pedagogy that “mobilize a being [or bloc] of sensation to interrogate the affective forces produced by art” (p. 92), and Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (2005) discussion of a “moment’s hinge” (p. 8) for transitioning between “movement/sensation and thought,” offer further examples of how the affective intensities in pedagogical encounters are complex, relational and likely felt before being cognized and named. Accordingly, the HPU’s synesthesia exploration was a practice of “de-territorialization” of both language and place; the deliberate mixing of sense modalities disrupted the habitual use of language to describe smell, taste, touch, sight and sound and provided an affective, schizogeographic production of the Hamilton Farmer’s Market.

Proposition 4: walk like an archive

Although the humanist ideal views human subjectivity and bodies as ontologically distinct and fixed, several theorists of walking and other forms of movement discuss how subjectivity (and the “body”) is produced through movement, and as such is constantly in flux. Frederic Gros states, “the walking body has no history, it is just an eddy in the stream of immemorial life . . . a moving two-legged beast, just a pure force” (Gros, 2014, p. 7). Similarly, Erin Manning views the body: as “a field of relations rather than a stability, a force taking-form rather than simply a form” (Manning, 2013, p. 31). Thus a walking body is not a material form that moves through space, but body-space-matter “created through movement, differentiating endlessly. This movement is intensive, flowing, and affective” (Truman & Springgay, 2015). We view the walking body as enacting what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call a “zone of indiscernibility,” and what Brian Massumi refers to as the “included middle” (2014, p. 6). According to Brian Massumi (2014) the included middle packs two different logics into a

given situation, and by bringing them together creates a third, which is productive: “There is one, and the other—and the *included middle* of their mutual influence. The zone of indiscernibility that is the included middle does not observe the sanctity of the separation of categories, nor respect the rigid segregation of arenas of activity” (p. 6). In recognizing the included middle, instead of reifying binaries we begin to see how different gestures, or entities can paradoxically become performatively fused (in a *zone of indiscernibility*) while still retaining difference (Massumi, 2014, p. 6). This process is productive of newness, emergent differentiation and becoming. In thinking about this conceptually we contend that the productivity and propositionality of “open brief,” an art practice deployed by the Artist Placement Group (APG), might serve as an example.

The APG, created in 1965 by Barbara Steveni and founded a year later by Steveni and her former partner John Latham, influenced the shift in artistic practice away from solitary studio production (Hudeck & Sainsbury, 2012). The APG placed artists in industry and later in government departments, as a way for artists to relocate their practices away from the studio and gallery, and to redefine the role of artists in society. The radical premise behind the placements was what the APG called the “open brief”: the placements were not directed by the host organization, there was no obligation or expectation of services rendered by the artists, outcomes were not determined in advance, and the artists were to be paid a wage by the host organization. Developing an art practice beyond the studio and exhibition space, the “artist assumes the role of facilitating creativity among ‘everyday’ people” (Bishop, 2012, p. 163). The APG fostered the belief that artists have a “useful contribution to make to the world, and that artists can serve society—not by making works of art, but through their verbal interactions in the context of institutions and organizations” (p. 164). The model developed by Steveni shifted the typical patronage or commercial ties between industry and artists, insisting that art was a valuable research and educational practice for these organizations. The “open brief,” Steveni argues, is a process of “not knowing” which becomes “the basis of action moving forward,” and which engenders a relational, aberrant and ecological re-formation of matter.

The placements ideally occurred in two phases: a feasibility study which might last one or two months, followed by a longer engagement (Hudek & Sainsbury, 2012). APG’s emphasis on “placement,” “context” and the “artist as cultural worker” sought to foster links between art and other disciplines whereby the “artist moves out of the closed art world into the domain of decision making and recognized areas of large scale problem handling” (APG, nd). In an undated memo the APG describes the procedure for a placement to consist of a brief feasibility study followed by a longer “fellowship” period. The main feature of the placement was that the organization paid the artist but there was no commitment by the artist to produce a work of art with such funds. In the feasibility period the artist would spend time at the host organization, to learn about the context of the placement, often using methods similar to ethnographic fieldwork—participation, observation, research design, objectives, problem posing, etc. As opposed to asking industry to fund one-off projects by artists, or to provide resources and materials for artists to create art, the APG model emphasized that “context is half the work.” The APG’s aim was to make a contribution to society by bringing creative practices to bear on problems within a selected area of society. The host organization did not pre-determine a problem, but rather through the open brief or a period of “not knowing” the artist moved through the day-to-day operations of the organization in order to focus on an area of interest. The artist—or what was to be later called the “Incidental Person,” (Hudek & Sainsbury, 2012) was free to function as he or she wished and to discover relationships between previously unrelated areas.