

Walking and Collecting: How can our thinking on materials and process in contemporary collection-based art be realised through the act and purpose of walking?

Amber Smith

University of Melbourne

Abstract

Walking and art have long been intertwined, much like collecting and art. As best put by artist Patrick Pound, it's the notion of a '*gathering of thoughts, through things*' (Pound, 2017) – a way of combatting the dispersive and entropic nature of the artefact-centric world we live in. Walking is it the 'modality of lived experience' (Forgione, 2005); an everyday, routine activity and yet one that as conscious beings, we know to be much more than *just* walking. What walking and collecting share is a preoccupation with time, scope, and a need to find a sense of completion to – or perhaps dominion over – the overwhelming expanse of our existence. It can then be theorised that walking and collecting when done in unison, are the process and method that provide the artist with the contextual and conceptual mechanisms for the acquisition and subsequent display of these thoughts.

Keywords

walking; artist as collector; autodidactic; contemporary art practice

Introduction: Distinguishing the artist and the collector

“The ceaseless task of undoing resident thoughts; containers packed with the memorialisation of muscle; dossiers of compacted recollection; items of reconnaissance and tubular recall. A babushka of undiluted thinkings springing from still deeper thinkings – attitudes, flavours, fancies, traumas. How they trickled down, filtered into sizeable and digestible mouthlings for our cognisant flesh to swallow, gasp or gape. How the blood beat with remembrance – echoed with touch and vibrated to the tones of that which lumped between my eyes or had breathed between my thighs. A day for all, and a day for nothing. Tangent articles and singular visions. I had laid my body down, as a master to the apprentice of thought – like a steward of experience. And I had been repaid.” (Smith, 2019).

This article aims to examine the links between materials and process in collection-based contemporary arts practice, and the action and purpose of walking – when used in combination. More specifically, how are both walking and collecting contemporary art strategies used in the production of works. I intend on doing this through exploring the theory of the *artist as collector* – an interdisciplinary idea distinct from both the *collector*¹ and the *artist* – and their existence outside of institutional and academic contexts through their application of autodidactic pedagogies. I am as such, interested in how the qualities and processes involved in collecting under the *artist as collector* model, are mirrored in the function of walking as a step in their wider methodology. To offer context and clarity around the specificities of the language I am using throughout this article when referring to the ‘artist as collector’, ‘artist’, ‘collection’ or ‘collecting’, I will proceed to provide some appropriate definitions. When I say *artist*, I am referring to any individual that habitually practices a process of conceiving and making new works of art². When I refer to a *collection*³ (interchangeable with *archive*) I am referring to a group or accumulation of objects gathered for a purpose specified by the *collector*, in our case the *collector is the artist*. *Collecting* is the process or act by which a collection comes to materialisation: or the process by which the *artist* acquires objects from different sources and brings them together in one *archive*. It must also be noted that this article is referring to a conscious and considered methodology of collection, as undertaken by the artist, exhibited within a contemporary arts context, for the purpose of contemporary arts discourse, and not merely the mass-possession of things.

For the *artist as collector*, walking is not just physical steps, but steps in a process. A self-led modality that is unique to other contemporary art practices. What does it mean when the artist forgoes creating objects, and instead defines their practice by collecting them? What does it mean when artists exhibit things that they have gathered, categorised, documented, archived, numbered, labelled, organised and stored – things that they haven’t crafted, constructed, altered or interfered with? The means of production becomes an important part of the conversation – as does the way artists are viewing the world – recontextualising, recording, documenting and archiving experience. Therefore, within collection-based arts practices, walking is often a fundamental preparatory assignment of fieldwork and materials gathering required in the process of accumulation – but also part of a larger, life-long ontological project.

Important to the discussion of this unique and complex methodology, is that the *artist as collector* is simultaneously the *artist as autodidact*: pedagogy, self-examination, autoethnography and self-reflexivity are as such embedded in the lateral, fragmented narrative surround-

1 Oxford English Dictionary, ‘collector’, online version: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/collector>, retrieved Sunday 16th August 2020.

2 In this context an individual working with acquired objects and archives

3 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘collection’, online version: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collection>, retrieved Monday 2nd July 2018.

ing the walking and collecting art process. The artist carves out an individualised and often neurotic curriculum of constraints and commands over their collection – the frequency, pace, categories, curation – and as such is a process that to some extent exists outside of Capitalist frameworks, institutional structures and colonial agendas.

What walking and collecting encourages the artist to do, is to see the world in a different way. As Rebecca Solnit wrote in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, walking ‘is a state in which the mind, body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together’ (Solnit, 2000). Using what we already know about the *artist as collector*, along with a brief interrogation into my own methodology as a case-study, this paper will look to the serendipitous connection between walking and collecting in contemporary art practice – how it operates as a way of seeing, a loss and control of outcomes, and its niche categorisation between the public and the private. Can we see the contemporary walking and collecting arts practitioner the present-day manifestation of the 19th century *flâneur*? This somewhat informal and purposefully poetic paper will look to explore this in more intimate detail.

Collecting, artists that collect and the artist as collector

As a departure point for the complexities and nuances of the *artist as collector*, how can we establish an understanding of the term through excavating the nature of each separate discipline to create a unique stream of operation. Collecting can be seen in every level of class system and in any number of applications (personal, private, community, culture). Collections can be amassed for their ‘historicalness’ (Baudrillard, 1996); a scholarly and institutionalised value; domesticity; practicality; mythology; and an obsession with origins and authenticity (Baudrillard, 1996). The act of collecting often begins in childhood (Yee, 2015) and is the ‘imaginative process of association turned material’ (Winzen, 1998) – generally beginning with selection, dictated by psychological factors such as ‘memory (things saved become souvenirs)...[and] history (things saved become information)’ (Schaffner et al., 1998). Collecting as a hobby (or profitable venture) can be perceived as a rigid, systematic and goal-orientated activity, whilst collecting for the artist is more open-ended (Winzen, 1998) —aiming to both indulge-in and divulge the often personal and paradoxical nature of collecting. Artists’ obsession and fixation with the anomalies in stockpiling, saving, and archiving is the ‘very thing that perpetuates the artistic reclamation of dubiousness underlying the assumed naturalness of collecting’ (Winzen, 1998). Throughout history artists have amassed ‘objects for professional and private reasons—as studio props, sources of inspiration, references for their work, personal mementos and... investment’ (Yee, 2015). However, traditionally, collections were gathered through the colonial contexts of scientific inquiry⁴ – a means by which to ‘examine nature and society as self-contained entities’ (Jacob, 1988). The emphasis was on encyclopaedic classification, a larger project of self-improvement and education and usually with the aspiration of building and transmitting knowledge (Yee, 2015). Whilst artists too share this aim, particularly in respect to their own practice, they generally work towards more subjective and subversive ends; their collections evince ‘personal obsessions... often made in tandem with their own work and on a visual basis’ (Yee, 2015) and often read like an epilogue. And whilst all of this context is important to the very notion of collecting and artists who collect – the *artist as collector* is neither of these things. The *artist as collector* does not collect as a side-project, for reference or research purposes, or as a completely separate venture – the *artist as collector* uses the very practice of collecting as their work – the method

4 Natural History collections more specifically, i.e. – ‘Tackling the colonial contexts of Natural History Museums: A Case Study from UCL Culture’, Subhadra Das

is the medium. So how can we take what we know from the contexts of collecting and art as disciplines to create an interdisciplinary understanding of the artist as collector and how both objects and the act of walking fit into this self-instructed practice?

Organising and interpreting everyday data through walking and assemblage

In a contemporary sense, the *artist as collector* is a recognized practice in which the artist dictates and controls what is accumulated and how it is assembled, often resulting in experimental and meaningful installations. The *artist as collector* demonstrates the ability of artists to interpret data in a way that is less convergent and more perpendicular, where individual entries are not subjected to a loss or merge - retaining their status as an article, yet still functioning in a set. This practice operates under the proviso that anything that is of value to the collector is of value⁵ to the collection; every piece is a necessary part of a larger puzzle; and it is with the whole that its value is further apparent or asserted. Here the very notion of *assemblage* in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense, can be seen to play out; with tangents and connections, both direct and abstruse found through the arrangement and containment of objects within storage devices, but also in the trajectories and pathways created through tracing territories and journeys on foot. The idea of constellations, structures, associations, *rhizomes*; 'image[s] of thought for assemblages that organize themselves in non-hierarchical lateral networks that experiment with new and heterogeneous connections that may mix words, things, power, and geography' (Adkins, 2015). In this way, it is the very image of multiplicity – its narrative is never singular or sequential because each connection leads to other connections creating a multi-dimensional assemblage. This very idea of *mapping* as a framework of such rhizomatic connections is an immanent and continuous process embedded within the working mechanism and motives of both walking and collecting as a practice, and one that reveals the creation of new connections and dimensions in a diagrammatical way. Just as two or more objects begin a collection, so does the multiple begin the assemblage, and thus begins the habitual preoccupation with documentation through the tracing of one's body through environments, across distances, inside margins, outside domesticity, through experiences and arriving at the various checkpoints of momentous human occasion. As Alain de Botton puts it, 'journeys are the midwives of thought' (Botton, 2002).

The ontological scaffold that supports the importance of walking and collection practices to human civilisation, speaks in diaristic gestures - like souvenirs - of a broader motive to investigate the relationship between ideas, acts, and the material world. In this way an artist's collection becomes an ontological database, filled with the props and prompts of their own investigation, in the hopes of prompting the viewer's own journey inwards. These *tchotchkes* work in much the same way that a poet arms themselves with words, or a walker with an undulating path. Language is in its essence durational, unfolding over time, requiring space be it read or heard - therefore, reading a collection also requires time, slowness and conceptual literacy in order to reveal all of its adjoining connections – a process mimicked through reading maps and elevations of terrain when walking.

As we continue our deep dive into the processes involved in collecting, and the characteristic nature of the *artist as collector*⁶ we begin to understand it as a process of mediating experience (Stewart, 1984), typified by a romanticised, idealised or even collective sense of longing (Campbell, 1997. & Veenis, 1997). With this constant (re)organising and (re)interpretation of internal and external landscapes, we become aware of the importance of walking within its schema. Walking becomes a modality within the mother modality; a physical and

5 Not necessarily monetary but rather sentimental, conceptual or theoretical etc

6 Noted as obsessive, conscious, reflective, nostalgic and sentimental

methodical step within a set of steps – but they are both of equivalent influence. Fieldwork is a very important element of research, materials gathering and process. As we walk, we are organising the information that is incoming; we are assessing, evaluating, categorising and subsequently coordinating our response, our navigation. When we are walking consciously (as opposed to merely getting from A to B) we are in the perfect condition to collect. I would argue that most forms of gathering would incorporate some form of amble; the naturalist hiking to survey specimens, to the post-modern city-carving refuse collector, or the second-hand store thrifter, to the path carved by the garage-sale picker-enthusiast, and the walk to the post office or letterbox for the eBay clicker. There is a foot to pavement embodiment inherent in acquiring things along with an active contemplation and consideration behind the method and means of acquirement – one that ties in with the way we store memories and experiences.

Collecting as a way of remembering, walking as a way of re-enactment

When we collect, objects stand in as representations of our memories, thoughts and ideas; mnemonic devices that allow us to access these individual memories, thoughts and ideas like tabs in a binder, or barcodes on a consumer good. The act of assembling a collection, is the act of memorialising our lived experiences. Therefore, process can be seen as a procedure of procuring those objects most suited to such an emblematic task. When we select and curate such collections we are sifting through the recesses of our conscious and subconscious mind; some objects will be easily explained and placed within an assemblage of objects, while others will be less telling. All play a valuable part in the non-linear, diagrammatical narrative that is being performed, through things. As we assemble such archives, piece by piece, a somewhat self-absorbed methodology emerges; one that is governed by a need to understand and explore the very nature of our own personalised existence. It can then be said that collections and assemblages act rather like a microcosm of our realities. Hailing from their historical origins of *Wunderkammern* and *Studiolo* contexts, the contemporary collection encompasses the global mass of our very cluttered, often nature-deprived, mass-produced and consumerist societies in miniature. A set for the movie that is our life, if you will. The objects; our zeitgeist. They are something tangible to direct our unspent feelings into; for people or moments that cannot be revisited or recaptured, and certainly cannot be relived.

However, we are able to re-enact and retrace our connections to place and memory through the act of walking. Returning to site allows us to collect the material objects of a happening, allows for a re-engagement with an embodied feeling, allows for visceral responses to past events and allows us to navigate through familiar landscapes or traverse new ones to reclaim vestiges or remains. As Tony Birch puts it, walking offers ‘moments, events, ‘sightings’, experiences in place that... carry great metaphysical weight’ (Birch, 2019). Considering that the *artist as collector* is concerned with the reshuffle or retrieval of objects that have been dispersed (Benjamin, 1937-40) and that need to be excavated and reunited – walking can be seen as a way of facilitating the distance and disorder that marks the mission of the artist as collector and the hope to arrive at a destination of a completed collection. The scale and scope of the collection is not dissimilar to the way in which a walk begins and ends. Or more importantly – the finality of which is always recalibrated and revised by the artist – it’s completed state a futile desire.

Self-examination – looking to my own walking-collection practice as a case study

Through extensive practice-led research and self-examination, I have distilled my collection process down to 8 very specific steps:

1. *Acquisition*⁷
2. *Memory/ remembering*⁸
3. *Sifting*⁹
4. *Evaluating*¹⁰
5. *Shepherding*¹¹
6. *Restoration/ clean-up*¹²
7. *Display*¹³
8. *Public Presentation*¹⁴

Within these 8 steps, there are often, further steps; one of which is walking. Arguably the most integral step, *Acquisition*, is the physical collecting; objects are discovered, bought or obtained. This is what I collect and where or how I acquire the objects. I procure objects through multifarious means and streams, mainly gifted, thrifted or found. Finding objects means that I must undertake field walks in areas where such objects that I want to find, would be found.

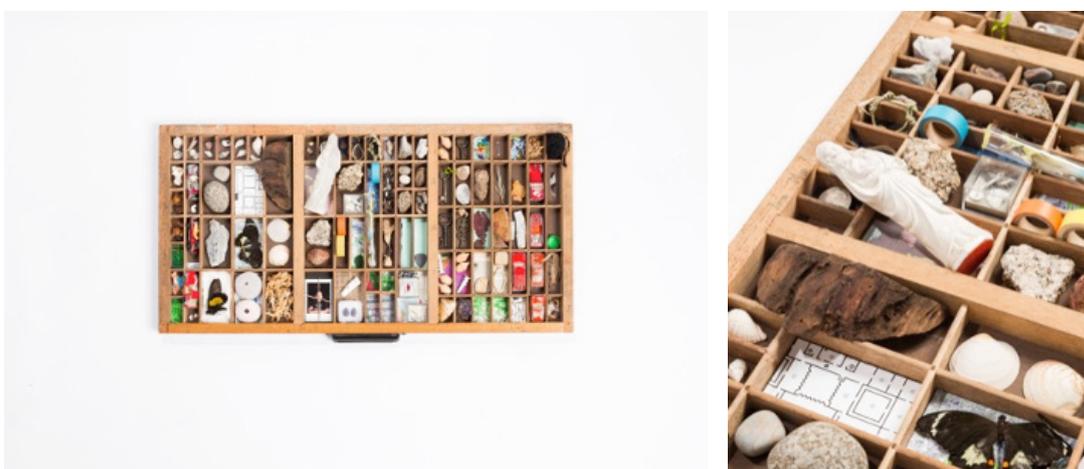


Fig (1) Amber Smith: *Your deities will not protect you from those you love* (2018). Fig (2) detail¹⁵

The walking and collection processes present in my practice can be seen as an effort to capture and fortify the overwhelming, ever-expanding, cross-referencing, hap-hazardously organised personal and collective network of thoughts and experiences. It can also be seen as a coping strategy or analytical scaffold that systematises the constant influx of new incoming information; the secretary of experience; sifting, sorting and ordering a physical and meta-physical accrual of aesthetics, concepts, objectives, subjectives, didactics and poetics to pro-

7 The material collecting; objects are discovered, bought or obtained

8 The sentimental, conceptual and meaning-association process; objects are ascribed value

9 The curatorial and sorting process; objects are chosen to be in the collection

10 The second stage of curation; objects are placed in a hierarchy and order

11 The unseen: the spiritual process and fetish element; objects take on an obsessive and unique quality

12 The physical repair; objects are refurbished or restored in preparation for display

13 The third and final stage of curation; collections are displayed in-situ (in bespoke cabinets and display mechanisms)

14 The public display and exhibition of the collection; includes audience engagement and how viewers respond or interact with my collections and how my aesthetic decisions directly impact the viewers' readings of the collections as a whole.

15 Materials: Typist tray, shells, matchbox cars, amber, found magazine images, Mary and child statue, found map paper, timber, natural specimens, geological specimens, tape, wood shavings, hand-marbled paper, human hair, hand-woven reed rope, sunflower seeds, used plaster plugs and screws, hessian, feathers, paper scraps, glass test-tube, leaves, plectrum, animal bone, artist's own polaroids, waxed string, zippo lighter, wooden acorns, pins, velvet pouch, vintage keys, eraser, bottle cap, jawbone, paint scraps and assemblage. 100cm x 40 cm x 3cm

duce a customised version of taxonomy, cataloguing and grouping. You could say that both activities begin with an exhaustive and encyclopaedic need to gather and order knowledge, aggregating the everyday data that surrounds and demands our categorisation, as well as a desire to document or mark a specific interval, time frame, or a site or place. The walker and the collector set off eager for the unknown with a keen interest to be at the mercy of chance and discovery and impelled by the promise of potential; be it the quest for the sublime or the ultimate find.

We are continually making decisions and assessments in order to craft our reality and it is this process that equates walking with an embodied collecting practice. What also equates the walker to the collector is a sense of a gentle and time-consuming productivity. For the collector it's the sense that they are productive even if are only accumulating, rather than making – they are making a collection. Walking is also a productive form of idling and there is a sense of achievement despite there being no concrete reward. Physical space, metaphysical space and the conditions required for self-examination and locating oneself within the world in a philosophical sense, require a degree of internal and external mind-mapping. That is, the sense that there is a correlation between 'what is before our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads: large thoughts at times requiring large views, and new thoughts, new places' (Botton, 2002). Through collecting and walking and collecting, we are constantly recording and representing the constellations of our experience – creating material traces of impermanent perceptions.

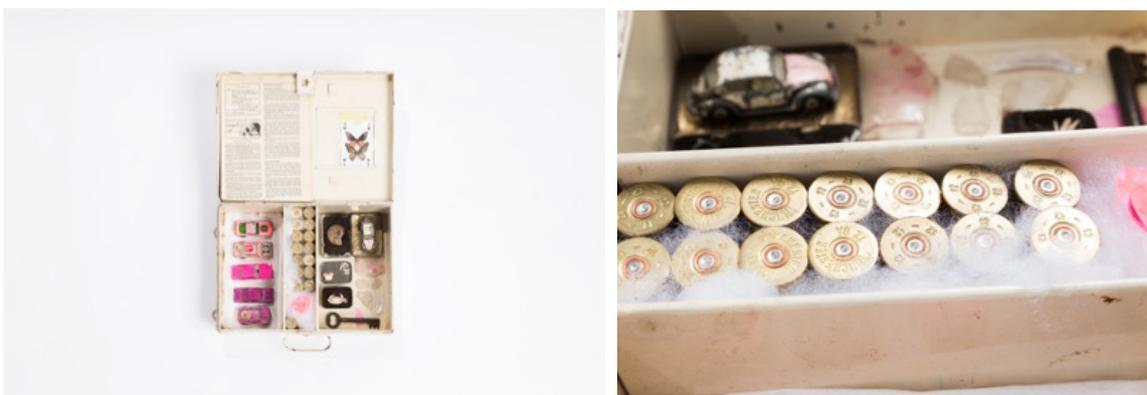


Fig (1) Amber Smith: When your child won't eat: how to give your mother sleepless nights (2018). Fig (2) detail¹⁶

An autodidactic model – learning and practice at the intersection of public and private

The collector is the ultimate example of the autodidact – the individual who self-educates outside of the guidance of masters¹⁷ or institutions¹⁸. The autodidact chooses what they study (in this case collecting), the study material (the specific subset of object within the collection/s), and how they will study (the collection strategy, i.e. walking, thrifting, sifting, auctions). This pedagogical approach exists outside of formal education streams, as well as operating outside of formal collections streams – being the *public* (the Museum¹⁹) and the *private*

16 Materials: Salvaged First-Aid tin, found newspaper article, birdwing butterfly playing card, tape, tissue paper, assorted pink matchbox cars, shotgun pellets, plectrums, cotton wool, tobacco tins, human hair, ammonite, crustacean specimens, sea-glass, vintage key, abalone, pink post-it note paper and assemblage. (open) 30cm x 50cm x 10cm.

17 Teachers, professors, private tutors etc

18 Schools, universities, colleges etc

19 Seen as: Scientific, objective, authorised and rational

(the individual²⁰). This third stream of collecting can be identified as *the artist as collector*²¹ and presents a unique pedagogical model of autodidacticism. Success in an autodidactic practice requires self-discipline and reflective capabilities – being able to regulate and control one's own administration and pace of learning is imperative to the process. Each walker and collector set the speed of their investigations, and the artist as collector is no different; they are involved in and influenced by a series of interactions with objects and location, that alter the means of production and the following outcomes. Their subsequent collections exist in a space outside of the ownership of cultural artefacts by institutions and museums and are thus not governed by conventional and maintained principles inherent in the mechanisms for the sharing and display of knowledge. In this way, the artist's collections can take forms outside of the established notions of what a collection can be. The hybridity and of the artist's collection and the use of walking as a collection strategy, means they directly filtering their encounters with information (*artist as archaeologist, artist as anthropologist, artist as sociologist* etc) through an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary autodidactic lens.

Walking as a step within this schema, shares this third stream – that is distinct from the two major indexes of walking; being, the public (*Sport and Entertainment, Tourism*) and the private (*Suburban walking, Commuting and Travel*). This third stream embodies a place in which the distinctions blur between all categorical polarities; the impartial and the prejudiced; the objective and the subjective; the valuable and the invaluable; the linear and the lateral; the organised and the unsystematic; the meticulous and the approximal; and is led by practice, research and response. This third stream has full autonomy, in that it focuses on a breadth of objects and curio operating outside of the notion of the *artefact*²² or the *collectable*²³ and is manipulated exclusively based on the value systems created by the artist. By using and utilising the preassigned contexts, imbued values and semiotic myths of the chosen objects, the collector is able to recontextualise, revalue and reassign the meaning of the object – both individually and within its groupings. Within these dichotomous spectrums is where the artist makes, produces and performs the new interpretation of the objects collected, subverting or sustaining the myth the object carries. This third stream also functions through a loss and control of outcomes and expectations, an interesting element of the process where the individual has vivid notions of what they are looking for and yet place their trust in serendipitous encounters. Traditionally, public collections curatorial practices could be somewhat pragmatic and shallow in their analysis of histories; painting things with broad brushstrokes, limited in the objects considered of worth, thought or display. However, this third stream allows for a more poetic and critical reading of histories - personal histories - creating adjacent narratives and looking at the individual, and their place within the collective consciousness of the world.

Walking and Collecting – Frameworks for method and metaphor

So how is walking a step in a larger pedagogical practice? Walking is not my practice, but it is an essential and irreplaceable part of my process. Walking offers invaluable frameworks surrounding value and method in my work. Walking also proffers a chance to mediate on the work's path in a literal and philosophical sense. Furthermore, the hierarchy present in accumulative collecting and assemblage, first becomes present in the hierarchy embedded in the

20 Seen as: Subjective, informal, empirical and fetishized

21 Seen as: the space in-between the official and the unofficial collector. This third stream is a place in which the lines blur between the objective and the subjective and is both practice and sentiment led, focusing on a breadth of objects and curio operating outside of the notion of the 'artefact' (being of cultural, social and scientific importance) and is often represented by the Wunderkammer and its preference for miscellany and freedom of classification and curation in its objects.

22 Being of cultural, social and scientific importance

23 Being of importance or value to a collector

process and act of walking. When we walk, we make decisions; ‘where am I headed?’, ‘shall I turn left or right?’, and we make judgements; ‘this area looks and feels unsafe’, ‘why did I go this way in peak hour?’. These decisions and judgements are both necessary functions of collection practices in which selection and curation become the primary influencers on the manifestation and choice of objects and what these can then say about the tastes and values of the collector. Also, present in the act of walking – in alliance with the act of collecting – is nostalgia; the wistful, often distracting musings of the brain; the need to revisit, readdress and recount moments of perceived, often romanticised, bliss. Both the art of walking and collecting entail a state of mind; a sense of reverie. Because the walk is partly predetermined as a collection strategy, the walking becomes predisposed to things. We project our view so as to find objects, and then both project onto those objects and reflect upon them. It is, to some extent, a self-fulfilled prophecy.

Walking and collecting as a methodology present us with a unique study of the habits, conceptual wiring and syrupy motivations of a perceptive and contemplative individual. To consciously observe, is to sit at the precipice of memory revival; it makes real, through embodied action, that which is often intangible; just as objects stand in for the intangible. Mnemonic devising’s that help us to access specific accounts in our often, inaccessible cerebral bank of recollections and rememberings. Walking and collecting are when we are at our most conscious and aware; when we are able to give a physical action and strategy to our innermost workings and requirements. As a strategy of accumulation, we are able to project ourselves externally onto a set of fixed, achievable outcomes. There is a sense of comprehension about the task – something not often felt by the individual. It is self-referential task, often done in solitude, exploring aspects of the self through resourcefulness and procurement of appropriate quantifiable symbols. Therefore, the artist as collector’s walk, is a hunt for appropriate material candidates. While a particular range of objects might appear plausible candidates, that range, by its very parameters – in the case of the walk perimeters – also incorporates the anticipation of surprise entries to the collection. These material entries link the individual with a collective; through narrative, a museum of artefacts, context, content and a sense of belonging. It has few constraints, albeit ableness, which means that it is for the most part accessible, inclusive and operates outside of consumerist streams, socio-economic status or class. While these often have influence over the nature of the walk and the objects collected, it does not hold any bearing on the performance of the act (or process) itself. As made known through Foucault’s extensive work *The Order of Things*, we become aware of the complex and interconnected nature of ‘value, price, trade, circulation, income, interest’ (Foucault, 1966) and the multifarious contextual and circumstantial factors within this.

Autoethnography – walking and collecting as a form of research

Autoethnography can be defined as a form of ‘qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings’ (Ellis, 2004). Alongside autodidacticism; autoethnography and self-reflexivity are embedded within the processes of walking and collecting. Walking forces us to examine what is before us; to take inspiration from our surroundings and to be more resourceful with our materials and methods in contemporary art. Whether it’s the daily walk, the weekly sojourn, or the monthly hike; as Adam Ford so aptly puts it,

‘the gift of walking is that it gives us the time to think, letting thoughts and ideas develop at their own speed, at a natural bodily pace. Whether the walk is short or long, it gives us an uninterrupted opportunity to tease things out, getting a new perspective on a problem. We

can reflect on our experiences, good or bad, get them into proportion, [or] cast them into a [narrative]' (Ford 2018, p 83).

Mindful observation is at the crux of a gathering practice, and it takes a patient and exacting individual to surrender to the fortuitous and embodied method of seeing, knowing and accumulating that is walking; both in the way materials are selected and, in the way, that they are then assembled. Think of Joseph Cornell; collecting as arts practice becomes so much more than collecting material things, it becomes a 'constant striv[e] to salvage the ephemeral feast of experience' (Cornell, 1947). Together, walking and collecting 'likewise constitute a philosophical, ontological project that reaches beyond the boundaries of art. Ideas are reflected by both the individual works and the [artist's] deliberate presentation of a collection' (Lea, 2015) of objects as though they were artefacts. The artist makes a ritual of the process and arrangement. Walking becomes another way of collecting information, collecting source materials and collecting experience. Commonplace objects, and the warp and woof of everyday life, and the very simple act of collecting 'charges routine rhythms of leaving and returning home with potential' (Lea, 2015). One becomes enthralled with the aesthetics of the ordinary and of chance, in a sort of post-modern nomadology.

Post-modern nomadology and the flâneur

The idea of post-modern nomadology leads me to consider: is the contemporary walking and collecting arts practitioner the present-day manifestation of the 19th century *flâneur*? Is this modality another example of the mindful idler, in a consumer Capitalism sense? How can we apply the wider concept of the philosophical and ontological project that is the commitment of the Baudelairian peripatetic stroller, or Benjamin's 'rag-picker', to our ideas around the processes undertaken by the contemporary arts collector and their active walking practice? There are many parallels between these models; the aesthete transcendental individual, where the imagined world meets the material world. Unearthing and recontextualising the past and the present, examining spaces and content, finding the thresholds where the 'conscious and unconscious, past and present, meet' (Buck-Morss 1986). And where the method and medium are one in the same. Benjamin's rag-picker is the forager, rummager and resourceful sifter - resurrecting old, abandoned histories, cutting and pasting from all manner of sources, interested in 'what is, what was and what might be' (Seal, 2013). In this sense, the walker, collector and poet synthesise, they 'find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse' (Benjamin, 1997). The *flâneur*, as not dissimilar to the walking collector as discussed throughout, produces through examining the cultural treasures of the past, but also the detritus and discarded objects of modernity. Therefore, their life's work is situated in an attempt to collect together the images of the city as they experience it, and 'to be left with a vast array of past objects, buildings and spaces that [they] then attempt to reassemble into illuminating order (Parsons, 2000).

Conclusion

Walking and collecting; a practice of collation, connection and connotation. The visible, actionable and invisible, emblematic. Notion of lines, delineations, connections, indications. Proximity, vicinity, juxtaposition, separateness, compartments. Comparison, location, association, position, demarcation. Boundaries, territories, margins, sections, slots, partitions. Areas, site, position, context, framework, perspective, networks, diagrams. Curating lines; lines of thought, lines of sight, lines of measure, lines that trace the bodily movement of thought process, lines of traverse and navigation, lines of association. Negotiating meaning; meaning of site, meaning of circumstance, meaning of subjectivity.

Organising location; location of relation, location of the physical, location of the metaphysical, location of individual parts of the collective whole, location of moment and memory, location of recollection and reassembling, location of recontextualization. Establishing links, ascertaining connecting positions, both adjacent, parallel, separate or stacked. Instituting hierarchy through concentrations, classifications, verdicts, adjudications, assessments, pronouncements and intuition. A to B becomes a way of guiding the perception, guiding the reading, guiding the journey, organising information, creating stone from water, here to there, that to this. (Smith, 2019)

The *artist as collector's* walk outlines how we relate to space and time, to objects and landscape. How we carve into it, trace it with steps, cave into feeling, use physicality to explain that which is spiritual and abstract. Further, I have found, whilst writing this, the creative walking experience is unable to be fully captured by the spoken or written words of language. It is something that can only be felt and held in our physical bodies or the physical shells of objects and their abilities to kinaesthetically hold the energies of both place and person.

The Romans had a phrase: *Solvitur ambulando*, meaning 'it is solved by walking'. The very act and purpose of walking, when combined with a collection-based practice, provides us with a unique example of how materials and process can embed and orate themselves in a highly autodidactic, autoethnographical and self-reflexive manner. A methodical medium that is a means to an end within itself.

References

- Adkins, B. (2015). *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p 25.
- Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The System of Objects*. London: Verso, p 73-80.
- Birch, T. (2020). Walking and Being. *Meanjin Quarterly*. Online: <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/walking-and-being>, accessed 11/08/2020.
- Buck-Morss, S. (1986). 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *New German Critique*, No. 39, Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin, pp. 99-140.
- Ed. Burdick, J. Sandlin, J A. & O'Malley, M P. (2014). *Problematizing Public Pedagogy*. New York and London: Routledge Press.
- Campbell, C. (1997). 'The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism: reflections on the reception of a thesis concerning the origin of the continuing desire for goods', in S.M. Pearce (ed.) *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, p 36-48.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Lea, S. (2015). *Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust*. Royal Academy of the Arts Press, London, p 26.
- Lea, S. Cornell, J. (2015) *Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust*, 'Diary entry January 24, 1947; archives of American Art, Smithsonian Museum'. Royal Academy of the Arts Press, London, p 27.
- De Botton, A. (2002). *The Art of Travel*. Penguin Books, London, p. 57.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. London, Continuum.
- Ford, A. (2018). *The Art of Mindful Walking: Mediations on the path*. UK: Leaping Hare Press, p 83.
- Forgione, N. (2005). 'Everyday Life in Motion: The Art of Walking in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (Dec.), pp. 664-687.
- Foucault, M. (1966). *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. London and New York: Routledge Press, p 181.
- Holdenraber, P. (1995). *Portrait of the artist as collector: Walter Benjamin and the collector's struggle against dispersion*. USA: Princeton University Press.
- Parsons, D. (2000) *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press.
- Pound, P. (2017). *The Great Exhibition*. Australia: National Gallery of Victoria Publications, p 11.
- Ed. Sandlin, J A. Schultz, B D. & Burdick, J. (2010). *Handbook of Public Pedagogy: Education and Learning Beyond Schooling*. New York and London: Routledge Press.

- Ed. Ingrid Schaffner et al. (1998). *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and archiving in art*. New York: Prestel.
- Seal, B. (2013). *Baudelaire, Benjamin and the Birth of the Flaneur*. *Psychogeographic Review: The Art of Psychogeography*. <http://psychogeographicreview.com/ baudelaire-benjamin-and-the-birth-of-the-flaneur/>. Accessed: 12/06/2020.
- Solnit, R. (2001). *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. New York: Penguin. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-art-of-walking/>, accessed 10/06/2019.
- Smith, A. (2018 – 2020). Assorted writings from personal notebooks, recorded while walking.
- Stewart, S. (1984). *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. London: Duke University Press, 1984.
- Subhadra, D. Tackling the colonial contexts of Natural History Museums: A Case Study from UCL Culture. Online: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/in-practice/2019/09/16092019-tackling-colonial-natural-history-collections>, accessed 11/08/2020.
- Veenis, M. (1997). 'Fantastic Things', in S.M. Pearce (ed.) *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, p 154-74.
- Winzen, M. (1998). 'Collecting – so normal, so paradoxical'. ed. Schaffner, I. et al. *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and archiving in art*. New York: Prestel, p 9 - 22.
- Yee, L. (2015). *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector*. New York: Prestel, p 9.