

Walking Art / Walking Aesthetics

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Walking as Relational Aesthetics I SUSANNE BOSCH

Relationships are central to this form of artistic work. In participatory art, we speak of relational aesthetics. It deals with 'the processes of love'. Elements of these aesthetics are part of our everyday lives, while at the same time being components of an unusual – because ultimately invisible – sculpture. Beuys called this approach 'invisible sculpture': formations that initially occur in the invisible relational space before materialising and becoming concrete. No one can ever see them as a whole.

The art historian Claire Bishop differentiates between two artistic strategies for opening up or creating the space for participatory art. One is an artistic practice that offers an alternative to social injustice through artistic actions that influence society. The second is an artistic approach that primarily confronts the situation with its own rules of the game. My practice undoubtedly belongs in the first category, and I very much respect the powerful influence of the second approach. The following is an example from my own artistic practice.

The example of Jericho: Beyond the celestial and terrestrial 4th Edition of Cities Exhibition, Palestine, 2011-2013

I responded to an open call for proposals from Birzeit Museum in Birzeit, Palestine, with the following project: 'Changemakers'. As one of five artists selected (besides myself: Iyad Issa, Samah Hijawi, Sarah Beddington, Shuruq Harb), we embarked on a process that was to last about a year, in which we were invited to engage with the city of Jericho. The process was divided into three phases: on-site research, which was published in a book, a participatory intervention in the field, and finally an exhibition in the Birzeit Museum.

Founded by Vera Tamari, the initial idea behind the concept of the Cities Exhibition was to direct attention to a variety of relationships between people, place and time, and thus to highlight the uniqueness of each Palestinian city in its present-day incarnation. Cities Exhibition attempted to show, beyond typical representations of nostalgia and folklore in Palestine, the coexistence of past and present cultural reality, in order not only to reinforce the uniqueness of cities like Jericho, but also to evoke questions of memory, identity and change. To this end, Yazid Anani, the curator of this project, invited us five artists to explore Jericho through a series of 'routes'.

Nocturnal walk

From the series of works that originated in Jericho, I would like to focus here on a participative intervention that took place on site. On 3rd October 2012 I invited people to walk together on a silent march through the night. Seventy people turned up at the Ein Dyuk spring at the foot of the Mountain of Temptation, Ġabal al-Qurunġul.



"Crossing Jericho", Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Sa'd Njoum, 2012.

We walked in silence for more than three hours through the Jericho landscape, following one another in a long chain: starting in the mountains, we walked along the irrigation canals through the fields, on through the outskirts and into the centre of Jericho, then into the final phase in the flat desert landscape towards Jordan, finishing in the ADS school (now empty) [1].



"Crossing Jericho", Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Birzeit Museum 2012



"Crossing Jericho", Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Birzeit Museum 2012



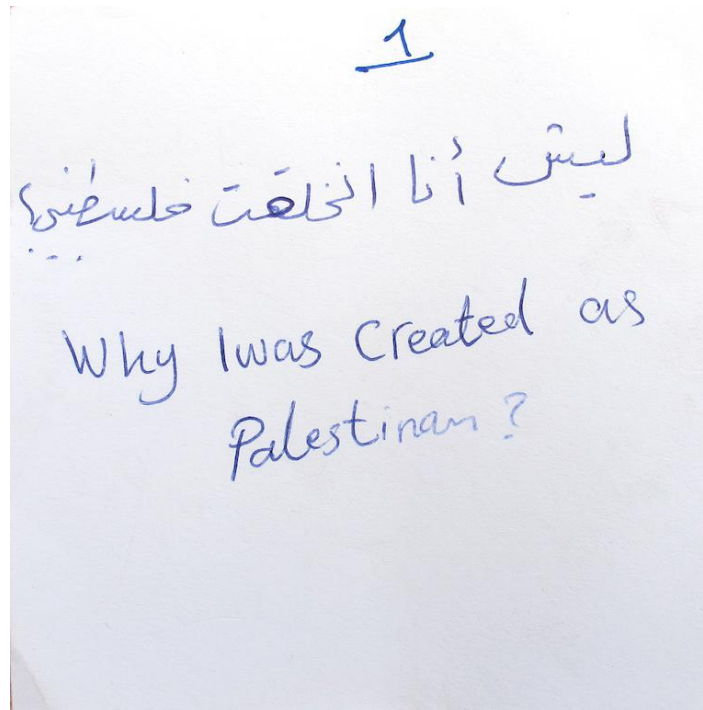
"Crossing Jericho", Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Birzeit Museum 2012

There we broke our silence, reflected on this experience of walking through this space together, and concluded the action with a meal in the open air, under the night sky, in a heat that had now become bearable.

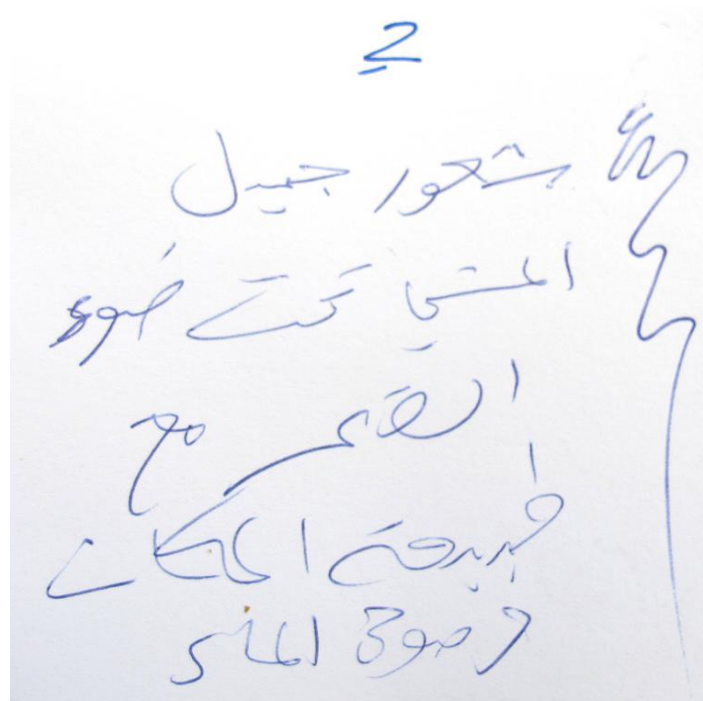
This performative act of walking through space was about the collective creation of spatial knowledge through experience. The silent communal walking (always with someone else's back in front of you) created a sense of cohesion without the need to communicate with one another, verbally or non-verbally. We agreed the ground rules of co-existence while walking:

- I remain completely silent.
- I will walk in a line.
- I will follow the person in front of me.
- I will switch off my mobile phone and not use it.
- I will not take photos.
- I will not smoke.
- I will not re-act if addressed directly by people passing by.

We stopped twice for water and toilets. This time, too, was spent in silence. Some people wrote down things that were buzzing about in their heads.



Participant note 1 during „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



حين تتحدث الطبيعة الانسان
 أن ينصت لها -
 3 - نسبة المكان وهم الانسان
 - إفتلاق في صرته الهوار ودراب الحرارة
 بينا الارتفاع والمنخفض
 - سمعت صوتا هرجاء الليل والمياه
 - كنت مراقبا لأفادت وما أكل
 اناسا
 - القمر بدأ رحلته معنا
 وراقبنا القمر أثناء سيرتنا

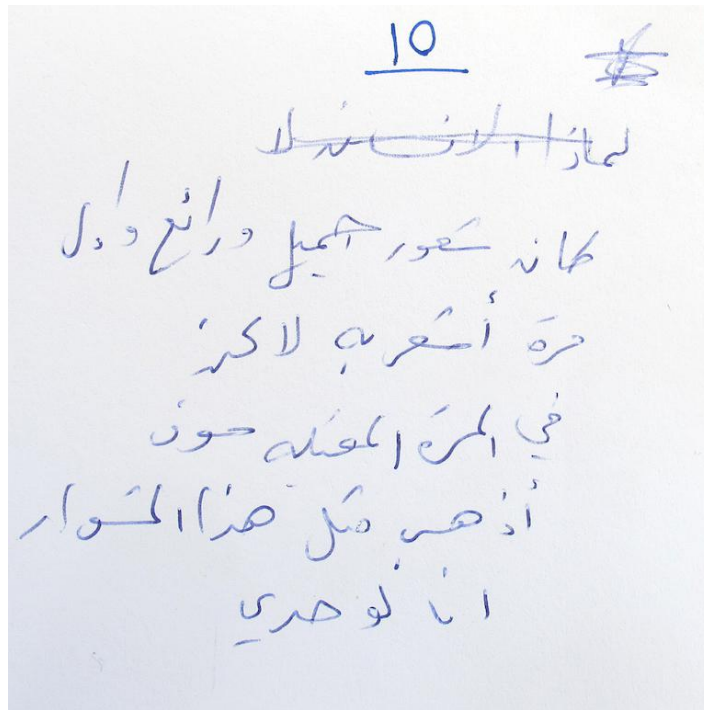
4
 صوت الهى كان
 قوى وحلو
 وريّة الرطوبة كان

6 السفر في جفرا ما لمانه
 حامله الخروف حبه لافوه
 مرور لذا كره لبيرونج
 بأصوات ورفاق لمانه
 ← الانسان كان كأنه
 في حلم /
 الجريانه مع الماء كأنه مع جريانه
 الدم كأنه منكمه لاجنه للمجنون

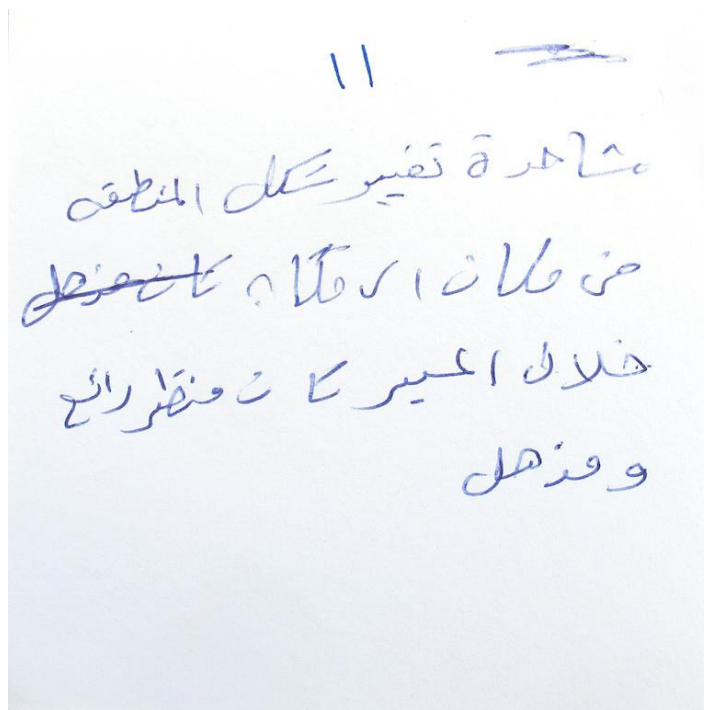
Participant note 6 during „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012

اكثر شي اعجبني في الرصد
 انظر انقل ملاحظتك وكنت يستمع
 بساطح حركات ومنه الكل
 ولطيفيا اكثر من ~~الانسان~~
 اني شفتها في خلال سيرتها
 الرصد
 8

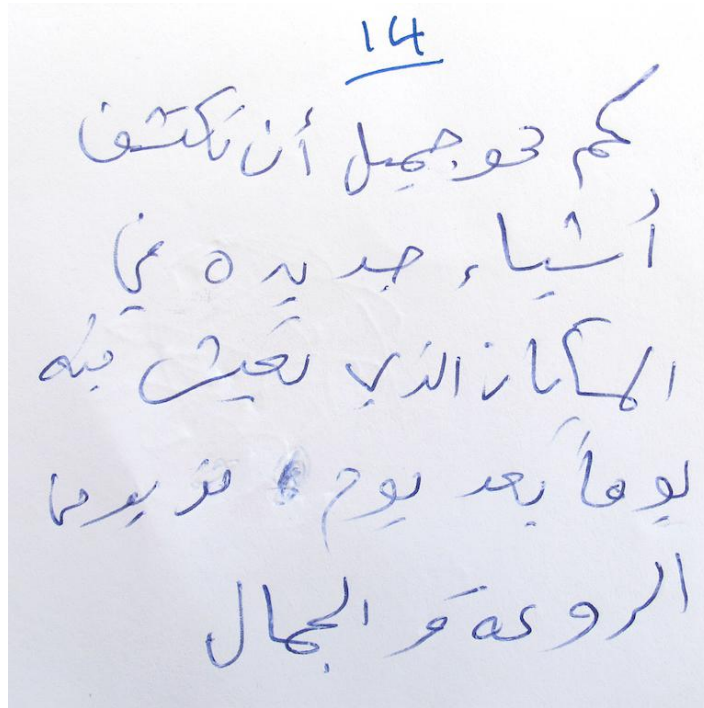
Participant note 8 during „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



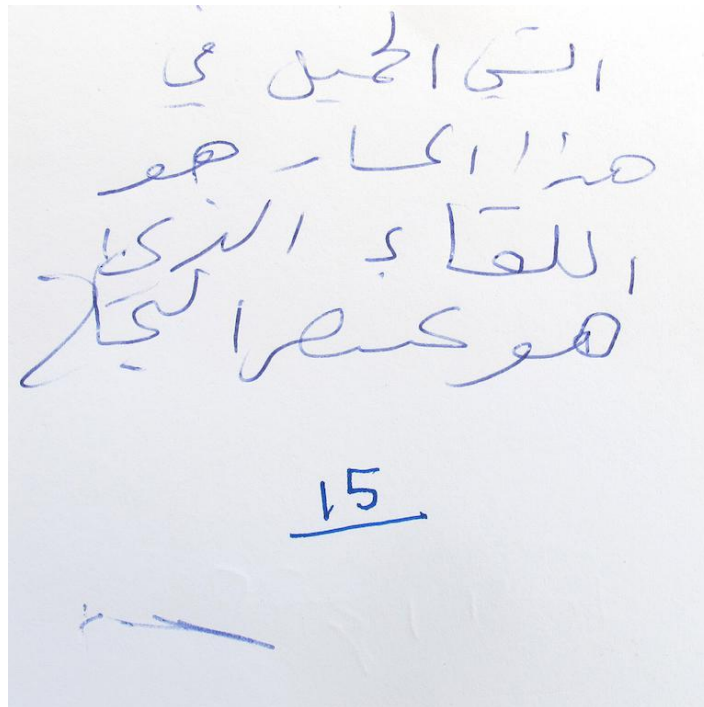
Participant note 10 during „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



Participant note 11 during während „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



Participant note 14 during während „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



Participant note 15 during während „Crossing Jericho“, Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Susanne Bosch, 2012

Walking in the dark sharpens other senses of perception: smell, hearing, and bodily senses. The silence allows us to listen to what is going on around us, but also to become aware of our inner 'noise'. Hiking through landscapes creates a different form of connection with the place. The tempo enables one to form a completely different awareness of place.



"Crossing Jericho", Intervention in public space as part of **Jericho – beyond the celestial and terrestrial**, 5.10. 2012 © Birzeit Museum 2012.

I knew, from the many times I had stayed in this place, that for many Palestinians the occupation had ruined their ongoing experience of their living environment. People travel through the various administration zones – A, B and C – by car, by bus, or not at all. Historically, however, Palestinians are deeply connected with their agricultural land, from walking across it, from driving animals across the mountains, from the processes of harvesting crops. In art and literature there is an extensive wealth of expressions for the beauty of the land and of nature. The Palestinians' souls are deeply rooted in this landscape. The fact that, despite this, the space cannot be experienced today has created a division that takes multiple forms: the origin of materials and food is unknown; the localisation of family and origins is no longer relevant; respect for nature and landscape occurs only from the perspective of distance.

The majority of the participants were Palestinian men and women from the West Bank, many of them from Jericho itself, and quite a lot of them had never walked through this landscape in their lives. The context gave people of all ages and sexes the chance to perceive their living environment differently, in a clear, safe framework.

Walking together in silence does not appear to be an unusually creative act. However, two things meant that this walking was in fact an artistic and participatory act: the format was consciously designed, in its visible and invisible components, and everyone was therefore able to experience it as a collective performance. In this context, where a landscape is to a considerable extent impassable, the act of conscious walking contains a component of civic reinforcement and local resilience. Some participants started walking together after this; others incorporated the possibility of going for walks at all into their consciousness for the first time. I myself had the unique opportunity of perceiving this nocturnal space in this form in such safe conditions.

Susanne Bosch (b. 1967) is an artist and art-based researcher. Her practice is based in socially engaged formats combining the social and aesthetic aspect of an engaged practice in a context as well as designing the visible as well as invisible part of this type of work. From 2007-2012 she was head of the Art in Public Masters programme at the University of Ulster in Belfast. She gained her Ph.D. in 2012 on the subject of artistic participation and civil society. www.susannebosch.de

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Endnotes

[1] During my research phase, which concentrated on using geomantic approaches to discover why this place has repeatedly played an important role, both historically and in the present, I 'co-incidentally' came across a project I had been unaware of until then: the Arab Development Society (ADS). It was founded in the 1950s by Musa Alami and exists, in part, to this day. The idea behind this project is that of communal, co-operative, social action, of collective learning and spatial settlement and cultivation of food. Musa Alami, the founder, was convinced that there had to be water in the Jordan Valley. After months of digging, water was indeed found in the desert land they had purchased, and a not-for-profit organisation was established, along with an agricultural school and a test farm with up to three hundred inhabitants. Several

generations of Palestinians were vocationally schooled. The ADS still exists today, as a farm for milk products, dates and fish, supplying large parts of the West Bank with its local produce. Sixty-five people work on the farm, and twenty-one families live on the generously laid out plot of land.
