

ELASTIC CITY

**Selected Press Clips
2010 to 2016**



THE NEW YORKER

September 19, 2011

WALKABOUT

SKETCHBOOK BY ROZ CHAST

Last week, I went on a walk around City Island that was sponsored by a group called Elastic City. Elastic City walks are not tours. They are conceptual, experiential walks. Each walk is led by a different artist. If you go on an Elastic City walk, do not expect someone to point to a building and tell you that Blah McBlah was the architect, it was built in 1921, and please notice the interesting comices.



This ≠ Elastic City walk.

To get to City Island, I took the No. 6 train uptown, past dreamlike-sounding stops such as Zerega and Buhre Avenues. At some point in the



The dreamlike sound of "Buhre Avenue."

Bronx, the subway car emerged from the tunnel and slowly crept along a rickety, curving old elevated track. I rode to the last stop, where I got off and soon thereafter met my fellow-explorers and our leader, Andrea Polli, at our designated meeting place.

Next, we boarded the Bx29 bus, to City Island. When we arrived, Andrea, who had just returned from New Zealand, led us in a hui: a Maori assembly. We introduced ourselves to one another and then walked to a wooden dock. A man in an undershirt said,



What falls out of your car when you clean it.

"Watch out for the missing floorboards."

At the end of the dock, Andrea had us do a few car-cleaning exercises. First, we had to be quiet for a full minute. Then she told us to focus on the loudest sound we could hear. I heard water slapping loudly against some rocks behind me.

Then we had to focus on the softest sound. Birds, far away.

Then we were told to listen to random sounds. I heard a basketball bouncing on

asphalt and a little girl shouting something I couldn't make out. I also heard a dog barking incessantly inside a nearby house.



Next, Andrea told us to pair up. Each duo would walk down the street, one with his or her eyes closed, one with eyes open, and then switch places. If you feel like doing this, here's a tip: crouch low, so when you trip



over a tree root you're closer to the ground.

We came to the end of the listening part of our walk. Our ears were now fully open. Next, it was time to become more smell-sensitive. Andrea took out a lemon and cut it into wedges. We passed the wedges around to "cleanse our palates." Then we were sent out into the field to smell what we could smell. I smelled the hollow of a tree, which in a children's book might have been Mr. Squirrel's house. It had a fresh-dirt smell.

I smelled juniper berries, which



were peppery, and a little pine tree that was very piney. I smelled an American flag attached to someone's fence: nothing.

I went into a junk store that was selling old LPs, trays of costume jewelry, paperbacks, ceramic doodads, worn-out casserole dishes—the usual. I pretended to examine the merchandise as I quietly sniffed. Everything I smelled had that old, damp, moldy smell.

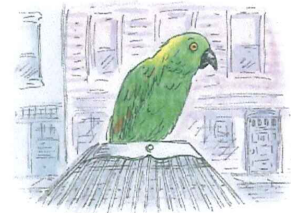


Junk-shop smell.

We reconvened in a park and swapped smell stories. Someone had smelled someone's garbage. He said it smelled like corn. We had definitely all become more smell-aware.

The next assignment was to observe interactions between people, between people and pets, and between people and objects. I ran into a parrot

named Dino, who was getting a little fresh air in his cage outside a café. His owner told me that he was twenty-six, and that you could see him getting a shower on YouTube. Here's a link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfIE-a0xp2w>. I observed that I was falling for Dino, and that Dino was used to people falling for him. I showed the owner some photos of my pet parrots at home. When I left, Dino said, "Bye-bye."



Our walk was almost over. The final stop was a little garbage-strewn bit of shore, where we sat on logs or rocks. Andrea passed around a Talking Stick and asked us if we had any specific hopes or dreams for the future of America. Then someone tossed the stick into the water, and we were done. ♦



n-cur

The New York Times

September 7, 2012

FINE ARTS
LEISURE **WeekendARTS**

Socrates on the Beach: An Island Walk



MARCUS YAM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The group of ramblers amid the flora and fauna during their 12-hour, 8-mile “Island Night” journey on Fire Island.

By JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

EVERY summer thousands of New Yorkers go to Fire Island, a narrow barrier island off the South Shore of Long Island, in search of sun, sand, sex and sea breezes. But this year, on the last weekend in August, a motley group of nine disembarked at the Pines, the famous gay resort at the island’s midpoint, hell-bent on Socratic dialogue.

The draw was “Island Night,” a 12-hour, 8-mile ramble described by its sponsor, the arts group Elastic City, as “part philosophic dialogue, part poetic reverie, part nature walk” and “an extended meditation on the present.” To

me it seemed like a chance to squeeze in a final summer beach weekend under the cover of intellectual self-improvement without having to pay Fire Island’s steep hotel bills. To Jon Cotner, the evening’s leader and a poet who teaches at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, it was part of a mission to revive what he calls “the ancient and endangered practices of walking and talking” — to something other than a cellphone, that is.

“I think these practices have largely vanished in our digital era,” he explained in a prewalk conversation, adding: “There’s far too much sitting. It’s killing us as a species.”

On Fire Island Mr. Cotner was kitted out in sensible gray Mephisto walking shoes; walking itself, though, has been getting something of a hipster makeover in recent years. Since 2010 Elastic City has offered some 50 interactive walks, ranging from “Total Detroit,” a three-day exploration of that city, to “Off Center,” a roving participatory dance tour of Lincoln Center to be repeated several times in late September.

On Sept. 14 the Walk Exchange, another Brooklyn-based group, will offer “Everything That Dies Some Day Comes Back,” a walk on the boardwalk in Long Branch, N.J., featuring a mobile

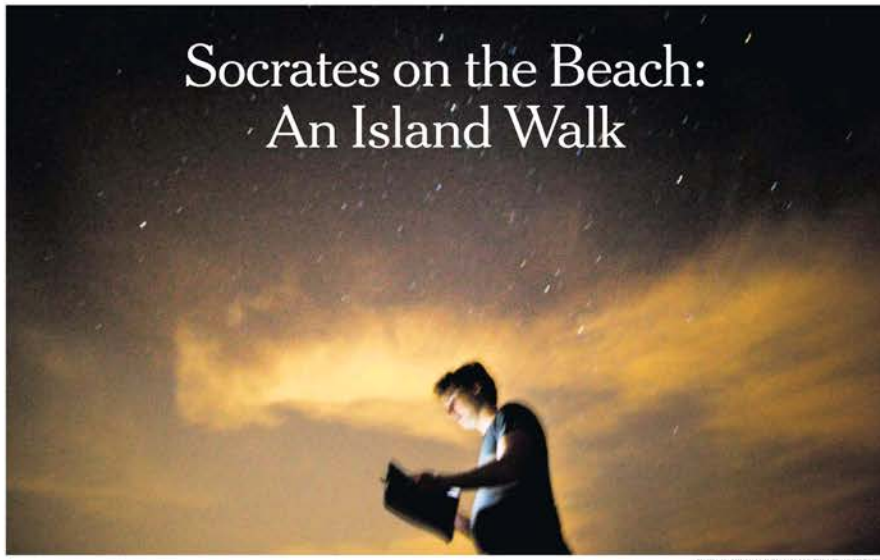
Continued on Page 27

The New York Times

September 7, 2012



Socrates on the Beach: An Island Walk



Top, the eight-mile "Island Night" walk begins, from left about 6 p.m., arriving at the Pines resort on Fire Island; following Jon Cotner, the evening's leader; and advancing along the wind-whipped moonlit beach. Above, Mr. Cotner reads verses about the night. Below, the walk continues, from left: stopping for a castle viewing on the beach; nearing the end of the 12 hours, at the Atlantique Marina; and finishing the ramble at the village of Saltire, where the group celebrated with a dawn swim in the surf.



From Weekend Page 21

sandbox and the symbolic burial of Bruce Springsteen-inspired "memory maps." The group, in conjunction with Flux Factory, also plans to repeat "Long Walks on the Beach," an event recently held at Far Rockaway, Queens, that paired random strangers for exactly that.

A similar forced sociability, but with a clearer conversational agenda, was the order of the night on Fire Island. Over a sleepless 12 hours, we would wander across the beaches, footpaths and boardwalks, sampling the night life of the distinct communities while discussing the often unexamined habits that structure our own city days.

From the outset it was clear that this was not going to be an ordinary late-night dorm-room ball session en plein air. While some walkers picked up last-minute provisions, Mr. Cotner tested some material from "Spontaneous Society," a previous Elastic City project in which participants engaged random passers-by in Manhattan with lines chosen to be, as he puts it, "99 percent effective in terms of replacing urban anonymity with affection."

"Believe it or not, that one gets a lot of smiles," he said. "People are grateful for the interruption." Around 6 p.m., we nine noctambulists (including a photographer) moved down to the wind-whipped beach on the Atlantic side of the island to begin the walk. ("Pythagoras liked to walk in groups of 10," Mr. Cotner noted. "But nine is a nice square.") After reading some lines from James Schuyler's poem "A Few Dogs," he explained the structure of the walk. Over the 12 hours we would reflect on our daily habits in order, superimposing a "mainland day" on our island night via a series of 12 prepared questions.

"I think it will be interesting to see a collage of habits emerge," Mr. Cotner said. "Together we can explore a philosophy of creatureliness." Speaking of creatures, Mr. Cotner had packed industrial-strength insect repellent, backed up with a consoling haiku from the 18th-century Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa: "Lucky to be bitten by this year's mosquitoes." Otherwise he was traveling light, carrying little more than blueberries, chocolate and water, as well as aphorisms he was ready to scatter prodigally. (Another favorite: the Korean proverb "Knows his way; stops seeing.")

Mr. Cotner's wife, Claire Hamilton, the official navigator, kept her iPhone tuned to Google Maps, but we were asked to put away our phones and watches and surrender to the poetry of fleeting moments.

Things started out prosaically enough, with a dissection of our morning habits: when we got up, what we thought about first, whether or not we ate breakfast — "a controversial topic," noted Mr. Cotner (a quinoa and hemp-milk man himself). Someone, perhaps inevitably, mentioned bowel

movements. "You've brought up a crucial point," Mr. Cotner said. "The ancients certainly talked about it."

On Ocean Walk, a boardwalk running through the Pines, we stopped to admire a yard installation of fluorescent plastic flamingos and tear a house occupied by the arts group Boffo, whose second floor offered a private view of a photo shoot on a neighboring roof involving drag performers with Japanese parasols.

"I'm happy for the environment of Fire Island to erupt into our walk," Mr. Cotner said. But as the group moved toward the Meat Rack, a tangle of woods known for fleeting encounters of the less philosophical variety, islanders seemed puzzled by our eruption into their ordinary Saturday night.

"You're kidding me," one passer-by said after Mr. Cotner explained that we were walking eight miles overnight to the town of Saltire. An older couple stopped to ask if we were part of a class. "I look at it as, we're members of the human species," Mr. Cotner responded. "We're delivering ourselves into the unknown."

In Cherry Grove, an enclave west of the Pines sometimes billed as America's first gay and lesbian town, we chatted about the town archives with a woman outside a door labeled "International House of Pink." Farther along, someone read a prepared question about our work routines, or lack thereof.

"So many people I know are ambiguously employed," said O'Hagan Blades, 24, of Bushwick, Brooklyn, a founder of a fledgling site-specific theater company who described herself as juggling several part-time jobs. Instead of asking someone I meet what they do, I've started asking them how they spend their time. But it really throws some people.

After a break for pizza and coffee, we walked through an undeveloped area called the Sunken Forest, covering questions about reading habits, Facebook use, exercise routines and whether we spent enough time talking (and walking) with friends. Back on the beach, Mr. Cotner read a fragment by the ancient Greek poet Sappho about a sleepless night alone, prompting reflections on romances gone bad. A short poem by the eighteenth-century Japanese poet Akahito — "When I went out in the spring meadows to gather violets, I enjoyed myself so much I stayed out all night" — led to reminiscences of nocturnal rambles in Brooklyn, the Aran Islands and the New Mexican deserts.

As of 1 a.m., the group had succeeded in maintaining wakefulness, if not necessarily complete

mindfulness. There was an impromptu howl at the moon, and Mr. Cotner suggested a 30-second sprint on the beach to restore us to a sober version of Rimbaud's "total derangement of all the senses."

Thus fortified, we continued down the sand, primed for philosophical dialogue. Around 2 a.m., near Point O' Woods, an exclusive gated community, Mr. Cotner asked a group of 20-something country club workers partying on the beach whether they considered themselves more free than the rich people they served. (Opinions were divided.) At 3 a.m., during a bathroom break at the Schooner Inn bar in middle-class Ocean Bay Park, news of the recent death of Gene the Machine, a local musician Mr. Cotner had met there last year, inspired him to rally the group for a symposium on what the Japanese poet Basho called "the temporality of life."

There were stories about a brother's sudden death and a friend's suicide attempt, and the general impossibility of grasping our own inevitable nonexistence. Mr. Cotner suggested that the next part of the walk, on the Great South Bay side of the island, could be dedicated to thinking about night

I'm Walkin' Here!

ELASTIC CITY WALKS

"ISLAND NIGHT" Sept. 15, 6 p.m., Fire Island; (347) 829-7779; elastic-city.org/walks/island-night; \$20. Sold out; you can call to be put on a waiting list.

"OFF CENTER" A participatory dance walk, Sept. 25 and 27, 6:30 p.m., Lincoln Center Plaza (meeting at fountain), (347) 829-7779; \$20.

WALK EXCHANGE WALKS

"SPONTANEOUS SOCIAL EXCHANGE" An overnight ramble through Bushwick, Brooklyn, Friday starting at 8. The Living Gallery, 1087 Flushing Avenue, walkexchange.org; free.

"EVERYTHING THAT DIES SOME DAY COMES BACK" **WALKING BRUCE'S SHORELINE** Sept. 14, 12:15 p.m.; meets at Monmouth University, Bay Hall, Room 230, West Long Branch, N.J., walkexchange.org; free.

"LONG WALKS ON THE BEACH" Randomly paired people take a long walk on the beach together. Fall dates to be announced; (947) 300-9021; fluxfactory.org/events/long-walks-on-the-beach.

THE WALK STUDY TRAINING COURSE A six-week class that pairs texts with a weekly group walk. Sundays, Sept. 16 to Oct. 28, 1 to 5 p.m.; walkexchange.org/walks/walk-study/apply; free, but you must apply.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCO LOAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



THE NEW YORK TIMES





Nisan Hayman's Elastic City walk on Monday night, "Twelve Grey Lemons," explored Persian New York. / MILES DIXON, METRO

Elastic City looks at NYC in new way

Manhattan. The artistic walks take place over 12 days.

Through Oct. 7, New Yorkers will be able to experience the streets they walk every day in a new way, if they're willing and open to the change.

Elastic City is a series of "participatory walks" — not tours — created five years ago by artist Todd Shalom. Shalom, 37, said the walks are more "experience-based" than tours, which are "fact-based." Different artists host the walks, which aim to give participants a "new perspective on place, form and community."

The walks previously were held over a six- to eight-month period. This year, the walks are concentrated

Changing perceptions

"I think I would be delighted if someone walks away with one new perspective of what they experience every day, certainly delighted if new friendships are formed and if new perceptions of space or of neighborhoods are made." *Todd Shalom*



Visit Metro.us to see more photos and find out more about Elastic City.

ated into a 12-day festival. "It's great," Shalom said. "All of that excitement is now bursting, and so many things are happening."

Walks so far have included "Let It Go: A Tashlich Walk," which draws on an ancient Jewish ritual of walking toward a body of water as a way to start fresh in the new year. The walk is hosted by Amichai Lau-Lavie, who is carrying on his family's nearly 40 generation tradition to become a rabbi, and Shawn Shafner, an artist who explores waste and our relationship to it. The Tuesday night walk started in Hell's Kitchen, and participants walked to the Hudson Riv-

er, where they cast off an item of clothing.

Upcoming events include Wednesday's walk by Aerialist Kristin Geneve Young, who will invite participants to challenge their sense of equilibrium by walking with closed eyes.

Shalom will co-host a walk with Sarah Schulman and Niegel Smith on Sunday in the West Village, which looks at the "gentrification and crashing of different classes" from a "very queer perspective."

Elastic Walks continues through Tuesday, Oct. 7, and ends with a benefit for the festival at Jack Geary Contemporary gallery on Varick Street, which Shalom said will help keep the festival free and pay the artists well.



WENDY JOAN BIDDLECOMBE
Wendy.Biddlecombe@metro.us

The New York Times

May 25, 2016

ARTS

Walking and Talking: Elastic City Announces Final Festival

By JENNIFER SCHUESSLER MAY 25, 2016



Elastic City's Todd Shalom, left, and Nigel Smith, and their signature red balloons in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. A red balloon has been used by Elastic City to denote the starting point for its walks. Eric McNatt

An African market in the South Bronx, a playground in Brooklyn and vanished landmarks of lesbian night life in the West Village are among the settings for “The Last Walks,” the final free summer festival organized by the arts group Elastic City.

The festival, which will take place from July 7 to 27, will be the swan song for the group, which was founded in 2010 by Todd Shalom. Since then it has worked with dozens of artists to create more than 125 “participatory walks” and other events in New York, Detroit, Berlin, São Paulo, Reykjavik, Tokyo and other cities.

While this festival takes place entirely in New York City, many walks look to the world beyond its borders. In “La Mano Immigrante (The Immigrant Hand),” created by created by Tania Bruguera and Mujeres en Movimiento, a group will “cross the border” into Corona, Queens, renaming subway stops, telling life stories and performing the unacknowledged but “essential jobs that keep this city afloat,” according to a description.

In “Market Thrum,” created by the choreographer and performer Okwui Okpokwasili, participants will explore the Gold Coast Market in the South Bronx, using techniques of “dynamic movement.” (Each walk lasts about 90 minutes and is designed for about 12 people; information and reservations at elastic-city.com.)

The final event will take place July 26 and 27 in the more bucolic setting of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, where Mr. Shalom and Nigel Smith, the group’s associate artistic director, will lead

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/25/arts/walking-and-talking-elastic-city-announces-final-festival.html?_r=0

The New York Times

May 25, 2016

“The Last Walk,” a sort of greatest-hits riff featuring cameos by artists who have presented previous walks.

“Over the past seven years, we’ve potentially expanded the way thousands of people experience their ‘everyday,’” Mr. Shalom, who is working on a book about the group’s techniques, said by email. “I see it like a small record label or an indie press. It’s always been a project with a focus to produce rigorous work and get it out there directly to the public.”



MARIANNE WILLIAMSON at Marble Collegiate Church

W29th St at 5th Ave, New York City. Live and Livestream

Tuesdays 7:30pm. Marianne.com

ARTS

SHARE

50 Essential Summer Festivals

By STACEY ANDERSON, VIVIEN SCHWEITZER, SIOBHAN BURKE and STEVEN McELROY MAY 20, 2016

The Last Walks

JULY 7 TO 27, NEW YORK CITY

It's not exactly a dance festival, but Elastic City's seventh and final season should be full of kinetic curiosities. Embracing transience, the organization, which facilitates artist-led participatory walks throughout the city, is closing up shop. Six guides, including the choreographers **OKWUI OKPOKWASILI** and **ANNA AZRIELI**, will take participants through urban spaces, drawing attention to what generally goes unnoticed.

elastic-city.org



"Feeling Is Believing," by luciana achugar, from Elastic City's 2013 walks. Catlin Ruttle

The New York Times

July 3, 2016

Arts & Leisure The Week Ahead

A SURVEY OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

DANCE WALKING, WATCHING AND BEING SEEN

SIOBHAN BURKE

▶ Since 2010, the organization Elastic City has hosted free, artist-led walking tours that move through urban spaces in unconventional ways. Whether taking tiny steps through Stuyvesant Town or using plastic bags as pillows on the pavement in Union Square, participants are invited to be curious, playful pedestrians.

Calling these excursions “dances” might be a stretch, but they’re often guided by choreographers concerned with ideas of seeing and being seen. The seventh and final Elastic City festival, the Last Walks, begins on Thursday, July 7, with “Their Shoes,” a tour of Tompkins Square Park in the East Village devised by the dance and sculpture artist Aki Sasamoto. Ms. Sasamoto is interested not just in people-watching, which offers some of New York’s finest theater, but in empathizing with the people being watched. Her walk, which repeats on July 12 and 14, promises to employ what she calls “peripheral viewing” and nonconfrontational “mimicking exercises” in relation to passers-by, as she promotes observing without disrupting. (elastic-city.org.)



TAKAHIRO IIKAWA, VIA PARASOPHIA OFFICE

The dance and sculpture artist Aki Sasamoto.

The New York Times

May 26, 2015

THE Arts Arts, Briefly

Compiled by Serge F. Kovaleski

Elastic City, Family Style

The performance artist **Karen Finley**, the writer **Wayne Koestenbaum** and the free-form-radio **D.J. Vin Scelsa** are among those who will lead “participatory walks” and other events around various corners of New York as part of the arts group Elastic City’s second annual festival.

The festival, which will take place from July 7 to Aug. 18, is dedicated to “exploring various planes of human and aesthetic experience” by getting outside the confines of the traditional artist talk — often by going literally outside.

During Mr. Koestenbaum’s session, titled “Marking Marks,” participants will start at 441 East Ninth Street, where Frank O’Hara lived when he wrote his poem “Second Avenue.” From there they will start ambling, writing and drawing as they go using “pencil, pen, stick, stone, scrap, spit” and other substances.

In Ms. Finley’s piece, “Sea Glass Mermaid,” she and her daughter, **Violet Overn**, will lead a group along a beach in the Rockaways, where they will “cre-

ate living tableaux” from flotsam and jetsam and “be castaways for a day.” (Most of the walks will be repeated; all are free. Reservations and more information at elastic-city.org/artists.) There will also be walks through Prospect Park and unspecified hotel and office corridors, as well as events at indoor locations like the Sunview Luncheonette in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where Mr. Scelsa will appear in conversation on Aug. 9 with his daughter, **Kate**, who writes young-adult novels, and his wife, **Freddie**, a “self-proclaimed ‘professional audience member.’”

That event is not the only family affair on the program. In an event called “The Man I Love,” on Aug. 19, the classical pianist **Leon Fleisher** will appear with his son, a singer-songwriter and actor, for an evening summed up in the program as this: “Dad’s downtown, there’s a piano, and **Julian’s** making the arrangements.”

JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

The New York Times

July 31, 2015

SPARE**Times**

July 31-Aug. 6

Around Town

Events



SANTOS MUÑOZ/ELASTIC CITY

ELASTIC CITY (through Aug. 18) On paper, this festival may look like a series of walks. In a way it is, but these seemingly simple trips outside are intended to make participants rethink urban life. Imagine a walk in which you close your eyes to heighten other senses, or a gathering that puts a twist on old folk rituals. Elastic City brings together artists, poets and performers to lead interactive walks (above and below, events from the festival last year), as well as experimental workshops known as “ways.”

In one workshop, “Make It Fly” on Saturday at 2 p.m. (and again the following Saturday at the same time), the filmmaker Stephen Winter will teach people how to turn an idea into

something a little more real — say, a five-minute short film. Participants should come prepared with a short idea, script or storyboard to start.

Then, Mr. Winter will work with them on some filmmaking logistics, such as how to perfect a pitch or plan for what is feasible for a production. The workshop starts at the Elastic City headquarters in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn, and proceeds to nearby Prospect Park, where participants can start filming to prepare for the next weekend, when they watch one another’s finished products.

The festival’s schedule is at elastic-city.org, where people can also reserve a spot in the events. (Joshua Barone)



LUC KORDAS/ELASTIC CITY



CAITLIN RUTTLE/ELASTIC CITY

The New York Times

August 7, 2014



Combining Culture and Exercise: The First Elastic City Walks Festival

By ALLAN KOZINN AUGUST 7, 2014 1:13 PM [Comment](#)

Music and dance festivals are so last month. Next month New York will have what organizers are calling a “participatory walks” festival. [Elastic City](#) an organization that since 2010 has engaged artists in various disciplines to lead walks that are less about sightseeing than about finding fresh ways to think about a city’s history, architecture and traditions, is presenting its first Elastic City Walks Festival, from Sept. 26 to Oct. 7.

The festival includes eight walks (most offered two or three times) in Brooklyn and Manhattan that aspire to be art works on their own often quirky terms. In “Signature Walk,” for example, Todd Shalom, the founder of Elastic Walks and a poet, will have participants create their own art pieces along the way (the destination has not been specified), using found objects for visual pieces, and creating song lyrics from texts seen in shop windows, among other endeavors (Sept. 29-Oct. 1).

[Anthony Goicolea](#), a photographer and painter, will lead a dusk and evening walk to take a group away from the city lights toward a woodland area in Brooklyn (it will be specified to those who sign up), where he will create a group photograph (Oct. 4). And Nisan Haymian, a visual artist and urbanist, will have participants visit Persian cultural landmarks in New York, and consider questions of immigration and identity, in “Twelve Grey Lemons” (Sept. 29 to Oct. 1).

Another walk will feature the performance artist [Karen Finley’s](#) “Mandala: Reimagining Columbus Circle,” in which she will look at the circle as a place where transportation, recreation and information intersect, as well as at layers of the circle’s history, including the destruction and reuse of Native American pathways (Sept. 26 and 27).

The festival also includes a day of panel discussions and talks at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn on Sept. 28. A full schedule is available at elastic-city.org/walks.

The New York Times

City Room



July 7, 2011, 5:09 PM

At Sundown, a Chance for a Long, Lingering Look at Coney Island

By [ADRIANE QUINLAN](#)

Beneath your feet, there is a second city. At dawn it grows, it is gone by noon, at dusk it is long and lengthens.

“Rarely do we notice shadows,” said [Chiara Bernasconi](#), an artist who was preparing to lead a group of 10 on a conceptual walk in Coney Island Wednesday night to promote what she called “Shadow Awareness.”

Ms. Bernasconi’s first instruction was to make a group shadow: a bluish blob that sat atop Surf Avenue. When a pedestrian approached an edge and halted, she observed: “Some cultures don’t want to walk in shadows. We’re going to have to be like shadow activists.”



In a park, Ms. Bernasconi, 31, pointed at a weed. “This is one of my favorite shadows,” she said. “Plant.”

At an iron fence, she directed a “shadow alignment,” positioning legs and heads to run parallel with slats. The net of a construction fence became a theater scrim. “You can really perform a shadow here,” she said. The group held their arms out, as if to hug their mirror doubles.



On Surf Avenue, Ms. Bernasconi held a contest for the longest shadow, judged with measuring tape. “I’m from Brooklyn,” said an onlooker. “But that’s a first for me.”

Another artist, David Hart, sketched shadows as he walked. “The shapes are so unusual, so elongated,” he said. “Your eye tries to normalize it back.”

In the hubbub of the Luna Park rides, Ms. Bernasconi pointed out the spinning shadows of swings. At a wall, she played the role of stylist, cooing “perfect, perfect” as she adjusted chins for crisp shadow profiles.

“What the person conceals, the shadow reveals,” she said, quoting Victor I. Stoichita’s book “[A Short History of the Shadow](#).”

The New York Times

City Room



To end, Ms. Bernasconi led a meditation. The group took off their shoes and followed the lines of volleyball poles across the beach, before losing their way amongst the sand's pocked shadows.

“At the end of the day you’re left with the ocean,” she said. “And it has no shadows.”

Chiara Bernasconi will guide her walk, [“We and Our Shaaadows,”](#) organized by the arts group Elastic City, at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday July 9, and Sunday July 10. Tickets are \$20.



<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/07/at-sundown-a-chance-for-a-long-lingering-look-at-coney-island/>

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

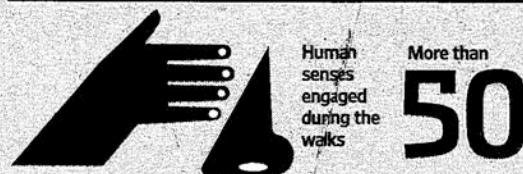
May 14, 2012

GREATER NEW YORK ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Culture Count

Walking Makes Sense

Choreographer Miguel Gutierrez will lead four walks—one in Prospect Park, one on the Staten Island Ferry, one in the Public Library and one on the Highline—as part of the Elastic City series, in which artists are commissioned to create their own walks.



Graphic by Alberto Cervantes/The Wall Street Journal

Sight, sound, taste, touch and smell—that's merely the domain of sensual rookies.

New Yorkers who want to expand their experiential capacities might consider taking part in one of Miguel Gutierrez's guided Sensewalks.

That's where the award-winning dance artist, whose choreography tours internationally, invokes the use of 50 senses—such as kinesthetic awareness, sense of composition, and sense of performance—for intrepid groups of 16. Mr. Gutierrez was commissioned to create these walks by Elastic City, a nonprofit presenter of poetic exchanges between man and city.

Living in New York heightens certain senses—the ability to suss out a restaurant within seconds, for instance—but it deadens others, so the walks are designed to raise consciousness about consciousness.

"Part of my whole reason to do this was because I was taking so much for granted," Mr.

Gutierrez said.

While none of walks take place in especially hard-to-reach places—Prospect Park, the Staten Island Ferry, the New York Public Library, and the High Line—walkers may have to wade just a bit out of their comfort zones.

"Embarrassment is this boomerang consciousness into retreat, it's this crazy relationship to self," he said. "If you can get past that you can get into a great experience and find out that actually you are much bigger than you imagined yourself to be."

Ultimately, he said, the more you sense, the more you're ready to experience life's many splendors. "It awakens things. Any situation becomes potentially more rich and pleasurable."

The first Sensewalk, "Everything is New," takes place May 19. The last one is scheduled for June 6. For information, go to www.elastic-city.org.

—Lizzie Simon

Artists lead participatory walks at deCordova



BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Visitors at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum on a participatory walk titled “Duly Noted.”

By **Eryn Carlson** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 13, 2015

WHO: Artist Todd Shalom and poet Kate Colby

WHAT: “Duly Noted,” a participatory walk incorporating techniques from poetry, sound, and performance, at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln.

Museum tours can be overwhelming: a barrage of information interrupted only by the unconscious shuffle between highlights A and B.

Shalom and Colby know that the very nature of tours makes it easy to overlook the ways in which artworks and their settings inform one another. Commissioned to design and lead a walk through the grounds of deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, the pair created the collaborative walk “Duly Noted,” a poetic exchange between participants and the Lincoln museum’s site and surroundings.

“It’s all about reframing the site,” said Shalom, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based artist who founded Elastic City, which commissions artists to create participatory walks. “The art is here to inspire; our work is really to activate it.”

These two nontraditional docents integrated techniques from poetry, sound, and performance to encourage participants taking the inaugural walk on May 9 to think differently about the deCordova and its surroundings.

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“Reading the art is apt because it’s so framed by woods and walls and water, and all this history,” said Colby, who grew up in Wayland and lives in Providence. “It’s easy to contextualize it all, but as that falls away, we can reframe it.”

Over the course of the walk, participants evolved from visitors to artists and performers. Individuals gave one-word soliloquies atop a stump, announcing their visual discoveries, and, guided by a partner, wandered the grounds with eyes closed to pay special attention to the surrounding cacophony. Comfort levels were tested when, lined up facing each other in a large elliptical glass sculpture by Dan Graham, participants were asked to read lines of Colby’s poetry while staring

Comments
Shalom and Colby, who met while working on their master's degrees in fine arts at California College of the Arts, planned "Duly Noted" meticulously over the course of a year, visiting the deCordova several times to perfect the route, pacing, and segues. But a degree of uncertainty and room for spontaneity remained.

"We can plan everything on this walk, but we don't know how people will react," said Shalom, whose work has been presented by the Museum of Modern Art and the New Museum. "We just put it out there, and if they don't go along with it, it just falls on its face."

At times that left the two in a vulnerable spot, waiting to see if the group would respond to their prompts. Shalom, who has been leading participatory walks since 2010, is used to the awkwardness, but Colby felt less prepared.

"I think what makes Todd's work work is that he's OK with discomfort and with a certain procedural fail," she said, adding that a crucial element to ensuring that things go smoothly is striking a careful balance between taking people outside of their comfort zones and standing back to let things play out.

"We want to push people a bit, but not so much as to scare them away," said Shalom.

"Duly Noted" is one of many commissioned artist-led walks coinciding with the deCordova's exhibition "Walking Sculpture 1967-2015," which features works by 19 artists who incorporate walking into their practices. Other walks, with themes including tightrope walking, mushroom foraging, and Rolfing, will take place throughout the summer.

"These walks are a really nice way of bringing in the different tenets of conscious walking," said Lexi Lee Sullivan, the curator who organized the exhibition.

"Walking is so universal and so unconscious, but it can be so meaningful as a democratic, expressive form."

October 6, 2010

Prospero Tour de chance

VISITING a city can feel like an adventure. Tourists often enjoy a heightened awareness of sights and smells, sounds and people. But for residents, much of this becomes routine—dulled by time, muted by circumstance. We are often blind to what we see everyday.

This, at least, is the guiding principle of Elastic City, a new company that offers a series of conceptual walks in Manhattan, Brooklyn and occasionally London. Founded by Todd Shalom, a Brooklyn-based poet and “sound artist”, these walks encourage participants to consider the city in a different way—by listening to the noises it makes, exploring the materials it’s made from and discovering its unexpected pockets of beauty. The aim is to feel like a traveller. Or, Mr Shalom explains, to “take poetry off the page”.



What this means in practice has varied from walk to walk over the course of Elastic City’s inaugural season, which began in May and concludes on October 17th. For a walk called “Brighton Zaum”, Mr Shalom led a group on an acoustic tour of a remote, Russian neighbourhood. City residents are often besieged by noise, he explained, yet the sounds we make or perceive are often subject to choice. He asked participants to walk silently and listen intently, to notice the sounds of the city as its own poetry. The quiet was an unexpected reprieve, coaxing into high relief the sigh of buses, the ripple-rattle of plastic bags and the occasional squeal of a train. The smell of smoked fish wafted importantly (listening closely intensified other senses). The walk ended with writing a poem in the sand of Brighton Beach as the sun set. The doggerel itself was silly, but the earned intimacy of the group felt startlingly sincere.

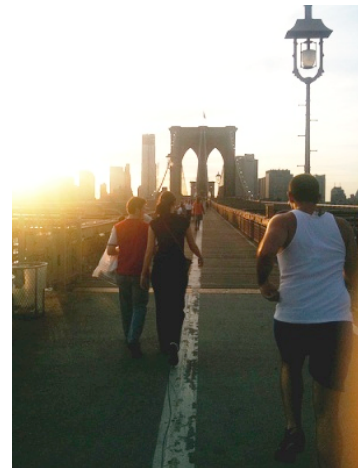
Mr Shalom has recruited experts and artists in other fields to create their own walks. For an excursion called “Homesickness”, for example, an Israel-born urban designer and “environmental psychologist” led a small group through Chinatown

The Economist

October 6, 2010

and the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The idea was to consider notions of displacement in an area associated with generations of immigrants. The tour began in Columbus Park on a Sunday, when amateur Chinese opera singers perform in the open air. One participant from Malaysia shared that this is where he comes to treat his own pangs of homesickness. “These songs are all about suffering. Like my aunts boasting about their suffering over tea,” he observed. Others on the tour never knew the park existed.

Mr Shalom describes these walks as “performative”, yet suggests they are a genre unto themselves. He has a point. These experiences are rare for being educational, interactive and personal. The artists often encourage moments of introspection and even vulnerability among participants, who may be asked to walk with eyes closed, make the sound of an inanimate object or trace the wall of a building with one’s hands. That such behaviour sounds regressive may be part of its appeal. With the right motivation, it can be satisfying to flout conventional codes of behaviour out in the open.



Together with Juan Betancurth, a Colombian-born artist, Mr Shalom is putting the final touches on “Lucky Walk”, the last tour of the season, which will debut on October 9th as part of New York’s Art in Odd Places festival. The walk, which considers the power of rituals and superstitions, includes moments of walking backwards, making wishes and buying lottery tickets. Participants meet at the Manhattan intersection of 13th Street and 7th Avenue, naturally.

The concept of luck—and specifically good luck—seems apt for Mr Shalom, whose Elastic City has enjoyed enough success for him to be making plans for the next season.

For more information about Elastic City and tickets to the “Lucky Walk”, visit the company’s website

http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2010/10/elastic_city_walks

ARTFORUM

July 29, 2015

Vital Signs

NEW YORK 07.29.15



Wayne Koestenbaum and walkers on an Elastic City tour of the East Village. (All photos: Kate Glicksberg)

SUMMER IN NEW YORK CITY, no matter how heavy the weather, performs its possibilities to those who stick it out. The wealthy vanish, at least on the weekends, and the college students go home, or wherever. The tourists somehow stay in their designated areas, and for these few months, for those or other more charitable reasons, the city feels as though it's got something of its character back.

“Pardon my shtick,” Wayne Koestenbaum grinned to a dozen of us gathered one warm July evening in the East Village for “Marking Marks,” a walk the poet-painter-critic was leading in homage to Frank O’Hara’s 1953 poem “Second Avenue.” We were just a few steps west of 441 East Ninth Street, where O’Hara lived in a second-floor apartment from 1959 to 1963, the years during which he was, according to some, in fullest possession of his poetic powers. “I revere Frank O’Hara,” Koestenbaum explained, “and this might be my favorite of his poems.” Koestenbaum himself is revered as a vigilante on behalf of the glittering intellect. If John Ashbery once described “Second Avenue” as “such a difficult pleasure,” that evening, Koestenbaum praised it as “a poem big enough to contain [O’Hara’s] consciousness and the city’s consciousness as well.”

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We were handed sketch pads, water-soluble markers, and pencils, and Koestenbaum explained that this evening's walk would be punctuated by his prompts. "We will be on the lookout for *events*," he said, "responding with linguistic marks or nonlinguistic marks"—meaning that our observations or ideas would be expressed within or without their sanctioned symbolic order. "*Quantity*, not quality," Koestenbaum insisted. "We are working in the spirit of Frank O'Hara, who was always inspired." Glancing at the graying sky, he added, "Let's hope it doesn't rain," but thus far only the air conditioners seemed to be spitting on us.

Our first prompt: "Who should be on this street with us right now?" Koestenbaum asked. All us participants staked out room of our own on the sidewalk, making marks toward the missing. Taylor Mead came to mind, though he had lived further downtown, on Ludlow Street, for over three decades. I drew a shaky lineup of stick-figure cats in honor of the dozens of ferals he'd famously cared for in his tiny apartment. Other names too: Tally Brown, Ron Vawter, Ruth Maleczech.



Left and right: Wayne Koestenbaum and others make marks.

More prompts followed from Koestenbaum every few minutes:

"Find an event on the ground to respond to."

"Bring to mind a shattered romance and make marks toward it."

"Write something impermissible. Erase it, then reconstruct something from its erasure."

"Are you guys in an art class?" two Hiltonesque blondes stopped to ask. I thought of how to explain, but decided I didn't want to. "Yep," I said. "Cool," the taller one said. "I totally thought so." And they walked away. "Population Generic," I scribbled.

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After working in our own sidewalk solitude, trying to mark the particular magic of the street and its grime, we all crossed Avenue A together into Tompkins Square Park, where Koestenbaum instructed us to walk as a group, looking for “omens that signify catalysts for our creative endeavors for the next year.”

“An oversize shirt,” one of the participants pointed to a man walking by. “There’s a toothbrush on the ground,” offered another, scribbling in his sketchpad. “It looks pretty clean too.” Koestenbaum pointed his pencil at a limp plastic bag, weighed down with what looked to be lunchtime garbage, hanging from the park’s iron fence. “Can I turn this into an omen,” he asked us, “or is it too disgusting?”

A rat running across our path. A good omen! A black sock in the dirt. Another one! Fireflies flickering in the descending dusk. The best omen! Someone said that a spray of purple blossoms was an omen because “it’s the time of night when purple disappears.”

“The disappearance of purple is a good thing,” Koestenbaum confirmed and made marks in his notepad.

Signs of our fortunes and futures were revealing themselves at a ravishing velocity, so much so that Koestenbaum announced, “I’m willing to go into the area of canned creativity.” Together, we walked toward a busking jazz quartet who’d been playing Dave Brubeck’s “Take 5” for well over fifteen minutes. Someone pointed to the female figure standing atop the Temperance Fountain, and we all looked up. Seconds later, we heard a loud clinking sound and looked down. A tap from a tap shoe lay on the ground.

Evidence of rhythms gone rogue, I wrote.

It was now time for an impromptu exhibition of our work. We tacked selections from our notepads onto the park fence, leaning in to admire each other’s marks. “Is there something about the arrangement of the work that’s an omen? Something about the v-ness of it?” Koestenbaum asked, and one of the participants raised his hand and said that he didn’t understand exactly what Koestenbaum meant by *omen*.

“An omen is a detail that we overinvest with meaning. We allow it predictive powers,” the writer explained, citing André Breton’s *Nadja* as an instance of an author “harvesting the city for signs on the trajectory of a visionary nature.” He paused for a moment, smiling. “People don’t talk credulously about omens anymore,” he said. Lesson: New Yorkers may rightly mourn the blanding of their city, but its possible witchcraft, its omens, have not vanished; it’s those who recognize and read them who are going, gone.

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Mark-making selections on a fence in Tompkins Square Park.

In his 2010 essay “Frank O’Hara’s Excitement,” Koestenbaum writes that “Second Avenue” expressed—nearly erupted—with “a longing for simultaneity,” a desire for the past and the present to hook up hotly in carnal, eternal immediacy:

Candidly. The past, the sensations of the past. Now!

O’Hara died on July 25, 1966, at the age of forty, having been hit by a dune buggy on Fire Island the day before. It is sad and strange to think that as of this July, one whose poems continue to pulse and enrapt with such tender force will have been gone from the world for nine years longer than he was in it.

As the sky continued to darken, Koestenbaum waved for the group to gather in a circle below a park lamp. Handing each of us a section from “Second Avenue,” he asked that we choose a line or phrase or word to read aloud, round robin. We bowed our heads over our papers, angling them toward the glowing lamplight. In this, an unintended gratitude pose to O’Hara’s excitement, we performed a “Second Avenue” cut-up, pasting together a poem of our own.

*which has lines, cuts, drops, aspirates, trembles with horror
your distinction is merely a quill at the bottom of the sea.
and I am a nun trembling before the microphone
kisses on the medulla oblongata of an inky clarity!
You will say I am supernatural.*

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As we read, the rain began: a parting omen, perhaps to be read as tears if you felt maudlin, a shower if you felt unclean, relief if burdened by the closeness of the heat. Or perhaps, to pull one last line from O'Hara, to be read against the combusting nowness of such enchantment

as a gasp of laughter at desire, and disorder, and dying.

— Jennifer Krasinski

BOOKFORUM

June 10, 2011

A Simple Plan: Jon Cotner's Spontaneous Society

Rozalia Jovanovic



“They say that carrying bags is good exercise,” said the poet Jon Cotner to a young woman on the subway, a large shopping bag slung over her shoulder. She looked back at him curiously, then smiled. “Oh yeah?” she said. Five others, including this reporter, had joined Cotner on his expedition, pretending not to watch but taking mental notes on his vocalization, demeanor, bodily gestures, delivery, and success at creating “good vibes.”

This was no New Age happening. It was a Spontaneous Society walking tour—the first of four that Cotner will lead

within the aegis of [Elastic City](#), an organization that sponsors unique walking tours. Today, Cotner had given us each two simple lines to repeat to strangers that were intended—through this spontaneous commenting—to generate “good vibes” with the people around us and also render us more aware of our environment. For the first twenty minutes of the tour, which started at the Hungarian Pastry Shop near Columbia University, we had watched Cotner say to one or another person, “That’s a good looking dog,” “That’s a good spot for a text,” “That looks pretty cozy” (said to a person pushing a carriage), and “I hear it’s going to rain cats and dogs.”

As Cotner demonstrated how to convey those lines with the requisite eye contact and hand gestures, he got mostly smiles, and laughs, with a few smirks and/or neutral statements of agreement. “In this fleeting existence why would we want to use speech to spread humiliation or harm,” the poet said loudly as he led us through a stretch before the tour started. It was raining lightly. “The American poet James Schuyler once complained, ‘There’s far too much genius in this world and not enough amiability.’”

While Cotner had prepared a “magnificent walk” along Riverside Drive for the first Spontaneous Society tour, a flash storm at 7pm caused the trip to be slightly more, well, spontaneous. We ended up at the indoor mall at the Time Warner Center, near Columbus Circle. Cotner told us that the lines he had given us had been “rigorously tested” and “99% effective in terms of replacing urban anonymity with something bordering on affection.” He had tested these lines himself thousands of times, over several years, in numerous cities.

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At first his lines spoken from our mouths sounded clunky, like when I said loudly to a woman carrying an umbrella, “I hear it’s going to rain cats and dogs.” She ignored me. “I don’t really say ‘cats and dogs’ in that context,” I told Cotner when he asked if anyone wanted to swap lines. We mixed it up. Some of us got new lines. Tested them out. At the Time Warner Center, when I got a man to laugh when I caught him texting by a stack of books at Border’s, I was hooked. We honed our craft at the bookstore and hit the ground running at Whole Foods. In the Dry Goods Aisle, James Yeh of the *Faster Times* yelled out spontaneously to a store clerk who had jumped on a cart and sailed through the aisle, “That’s a great way to get across the store.” Later Yeh would generate good vibes around the soup station by telling a woman about free samples of the lobster bisque.

The experiment bore a striking resemblance in spirit to the dialogue that Cotner carries on with Andy Fitch in *Ten Walks / Two Talks*. That book, as stated, contains two dialogues between Fitch and Cotner as they traverse Central Park from the Harlem Meer to Belvedere Castle, discussing everything from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* to the smell of the hip cream used by Cotner’s then roommate, an octogenarian woman, letting their environment shape the movement of their discussion. “Their meandering is an aesthetic and intellectual stretch, since they walk and think artfully, poetry in motion,” stated Lynne Tillman about the book. “Maybe 21st Century dandies or rootless homeboys, they observe the unexpected in urban landscapes, notice people stunned or easy.” Similarly, this exercise seemed to ask us to observe people, to catch them at just the right moment when they might be receptive to a “gentle intervention.” Or as Eileen Myles stated, “When Jon and Andy walk around Manhattan talking about things I feel like they are a moving page from that very fine idea in which small talk is large and nothing is more interesting or more entrancing than allowing the city to model for you.”

It was as though, through our small talk, we were operating under Oulipian constraints. With a simple goal, and by these simple verbal acts, we didn’t have to worry about rejection or to concern ourselves with anything but developing a heightened awareness of our surroundings, perceiving whether people would be receptive to our acts or were simply trying to get from point A to B at any given moment, adjusting our delivery, and gaining as a result the awareness that we could generate positive sentiments by something as small as a compliment, a shared thought about the weather, or simply the confident willingness to hold eye contact rather than let it go. Staying in a tightly formed group—Cotner took pains to keep us all together—gave us permission to say things and to reach out in a way we might not have if left to wander around on our own.

Though the lines did for a good part of the tour tend toward the goal of abolishing the “distance between us and the world” and creating “a moment of understanding,” passersby were not always tickled. When Cotner said to a group of men smoking outside of a bar, “That looks like a good place for a smoke,” one man, not amused, shouted out. “What did you say?” He followed us around a corner and repeated more forcefully, “What did you just say to me?” to which we all quickened our pace, got stern-faced, and dispersed our attentions to seem less group-like, less in collusion. “As the ancient Greek poet Sappho reminds us,” Cotner later said around a table when revisiting the pros and cons of the day, “when some fool explodes rage in your breast, / hold back that yapping tongue.” And with his characteristic Haiku-like non-sequiturs, Cotner further explained, “This project aims for ultimate communication. These lines are imperfect.”

BOOKFORUM

June 10, 2011

As with magic, which is considered black when practiced on another party without his or her knowledge or approval—even if the intent is to heal—our practice mirrored a dark art, though the effect we were intending was simply the creation of good vibes. It can be argued that people have a right to refuse good vibes. As one commenter, RadioSilence, stated on the culture site, Boing Boing, about Cotner’s conceptual walk, “I really don’t want, and am not inviting, people’s opinion of my ice-cream/dogs/baby.”

But the good vibes were received, as Cotner had suggested, with nearly perfect effectiveness, and, what’s more, returned with similar success. Members of the tour got smiles, friendly conversation, and even compliments from people they hadn’t approached. People in the group noted how they felt more “open” to other people after the experience, and how they were surprised by how often their statements were met with smiles or laughter. James Yeh said that as a result of the experience, he could see himself possibly making this a more regular practice. Jen, another member of our group (all of whom felt affected and bettered by the experience), said she had been most pleased when she got a smile that suggested she had managed to surprise someone with her statement. Like when she complimented a woman on the color of her shirt. “I can’t remember what color it was,” she said. “But I remember the smile. The smile was good.”

THE NEW YORKER

THE BOOK BENCH

June 14, 2011

HELLO, STRANGER: ON THE TOWN WITH THE SPONTANEOUS SOCIETY

Posted by *Stacey Mickelbart*

Last Friday night, I joined the writer and man-about-town Jon Cotner for an installment of his “Spontaneous Society”—a conceptual walk organized under the auspices of Elastic City, an art project that encourages “ongoing poetic exchange with the places we live in and visit.”

For this experience in what Cotner calls “affable cosmopolitan poetry,” five walkers join him for a stroll. Each is assigned two potential lines to deliver upon encountering a stranger in a certain scenario. One of mine was “That’s a good-looking dog,” a compliment I was to give anyone with one—just one—furry friend. (People with two or three have a “duo” or a “wolfpack.”) Other lines include “It’s a good day for a ride,” when a biker passed, or “I wish you safe travels,” to a passerby towing a suitcase.



The idea was born of “Ten Walks/Two Talks,” a book that Cotner co-authored with Andy Fitch, featuring ten sixty-minute, sixty-sentence walks and two longer conversations between the two of them while they roved throughout the city. The point of the Spontaneous Society walks, Cotner explained, is to restore a basic social spontaneity that he thinks has been lost (especially since the advent of headphones and cellphones). The “gentle interventions” we’d be performing would connect us with our fellow New Yorkers, and help us to slow down: “If we engage daily life in the right way, it’s more than we could ever desire,” he said. “There is plenty to marvel at and engage with.”

The walk I took part in began at the Lifethyme Natural Market, on Ninth Street and Sixth Avenue. Cotner encouraged us to do some freeform stretching before the walk, and as we did, a couple of commuters joined us. We set off toward Washington Square Park, and soon I was approaching people right and left. I found I

THE NEW YORKER

THE BOOK BENCH

had it easy with the dog flattery. Everyone I met responded with at least a fleeting smile. My favorite response was from a man walking a pug. “That’s a good-looking dog,” I said, and his eyes lit up. “Thanks!” he said. “It has nothing to do with me, of course. His name is Squish.”

Some of my fellow walkers faced challenges. One man felt like a stalker as he raced to catch up with a tiny girl zooming along. “That’s a cool scooter,” he said, and her dad beamed. One woman was constantly engaged in longer conversations, explaining that the line “That’s a nice sound” always inspired people with instruments to play a bit more or tell her her about the instrument. Teen-agers, in general, seemed weirded out or a bit too cool for a stranger who tried to chat. We regrouped to share our experiences, then journeyed down MacDougal, this time delivering spontaneous lines based on who and what we saw.

The general response we received was positive. I suspect that this had much to do with our teacher: Cotner has mussed curly hair, a genial manner, and wears geriatric-looking black shoes. He has tested the lines thousands of times in many cities, and knows just the right volume, timing, and tone to use. “It’s not just what we say,” he explained, “but how we say it. That’s where the poetry comes in.”

But there’s another ingredient to his success: he simply has no fear. He’s practicing, he told us, “joy intensification,” so he isn’t worried if people will be annoyed, or find him odd, or ignore him. If they do, it doesn’t really matter.

If you’re up for some joy intensification, Cotner is hosting two more walks this week, and spaces remain in the East Village ramble. [You can find more info here.](#)

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2011/06/hello-stranger.html>

NEW YORK POST

August 24, 2012

Kooky Brooklyn tour is a walk in the park



Participants in "Fabstractions," an eccentric walking tour of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, get cozy with a pair of columns.

By LEIGH WITCHEL

PROSPECT Park in the dark? It's no horror story — it's "Fabstractions," a walk led by artist Todd Shalom and his group, Elastic City. This 90-minute guided tour doesn't show you the sights. Instead, it makes you look more closely at what's around to help you get in touch with your inner artist.

On a mild summer evening, our group of 10 — mostly 20-something women, some local, some not — met outside the Prospect Park subway station. Shalom began by asking us to examine the blotches in the concrete and name it as if it were a painting.

"'Sidewalk Pimples'?" someone suggested.

But the mood changed as we entered the park, in all its nighttime magic. The deafening chirr of crickets drowned out the conversations around us.

In the lamp-lit darkness, we passed streams and the glowing white pavilion of the Audubon Center. Sitting down by a small waterfall, we cupped our ears in different ways, changing the sound of falling water into a sonata. Noticing small details like that was like calisthenics for our senses.

We took turns merging with the architecture, and half of us revised the others' poses. Some gave micro-poetry readings of

text scavenged from street signs on Flatbush Avenue. (One not-quite haiku: "Unlimited Empire Rehabilitation. Open late.") A young couple — sparring with glow sticks as if they were lightsabers — gave a mini-performance in Czech.

The walk ended with kisses, and Shalom suggesting a drink at a local bar. "You know a walk is successful if people want to stay after and chat," the 35-year-old says.

He and other poets, painters, choreographers and the odd psychotherapist started giving walks around the city in 2010, before expanding to such farflung locales as Berlin and São Paulo, Brazil.

The jaunts have confused a few people who thought they'd signed on for a conventional tour.

"I'm not going to tell you about this building," Shalom joked earlier. "We're going to whisper secrets into the holes in the brick."

It's a little earnest and a little kooky, and yes, you might feel silly in a dark tunnel, making sounds with strangers. But on a beautiful summer evening, there's a poet in all of us.

"Fabstractions" meets again tonight and Tuesday night at 8:30 at 43 Lincoln Road, Brooklyn. For tickets, \$20, and other information, visit elastic-city.org or call 347-829-7779.

DAILY NEWS

50¢ <http://www.mostnewyork.com> NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

September 26, 2014

BROOKLYN NEWS

These walks are Elastic & fantastic!

BY DOYLE MURPHY
NEWYORKDAILYNEWS

TAKE a walk on the wild side.

The 12-day Elastic City Walks Festival through Brooklyn and Manhattan upends the typical guided historical tour with roaming artists who teach strangers a new way to look at the city.

"The walk is the performance," said founder Todd Shalom, 37. "The artists are leading people in a performance that goes through a certain neighborhood."

Each one is different and depends on the group who shows up, said Shalom, an instructor in the Pratt Institute's new MFA writing program.

Some artists have asked people to create human monuments to mimic and reimagine the statues they pass.

Shalom has sent participants to collect random objects lying around and then use them to turn sidewalk squares into temporary artworks.

The Prospect-Lefferts Gardens resident has been leading the unique tours for 11 years.

He began with "sound walks," guiding strangers through the noises of city neighborhoods, and eventually created one that led

groups through Chelsea gay bars, adult video stores and a leather menagerie.

Elastic City, which is now in its fifth year, has grown to include more than 20 poets, artists and curators. The free walks take place from Sept. 26 to Oct. 7.

The Brooklyn museum is sponsoring two as part of the festival's "Crossing Brooklyn" exhibit.

"We have all the tools right here to make the everyday extraordinary," Shalom said.

dmmurphy@nydailynews.com



Todd Shalom leads Elastic City walks.

August 17, 2015

METRO



A singalong 'Annie' tour, and other NYC walks off the beaten path

By Elisabeth Vincentelli

August 17, 2015 | 7:00am



Erin Markey leads an "Annie" walk through Williamsburg.

Photo: Tamara Beckwith

The best way to know a city is by foot. Outfits like Big Onion have their place, especially for out-of-towners looking for the basics, but locals and more adventurous visitors may want something quirkier, more offbeat. We have just the walking tours for you.

Elastic City puts artists in charge of its free, high-concept tours. The fifth season ends with a bang Tuesday (Aug. 18) with writer-performer Erin Markey's "Daddy Warbucks, Please Adopt Me (a.k.a. The 'Annie' Tour!)." Markey takes her group through the heart of hipster Williamsburg where, as she recently announced, "100 percent of the movie 'Annie' was shot."

This is just the first of Markey's many, many fibs, each more entertaining than the last (pointing to the evening sky: "This is the actual moon they used in the movie"). And yes, there are singalongs, but don't worry: She hands out lyric sheets. elastic-city.org.

NEW YORK POST

August 17, 2015

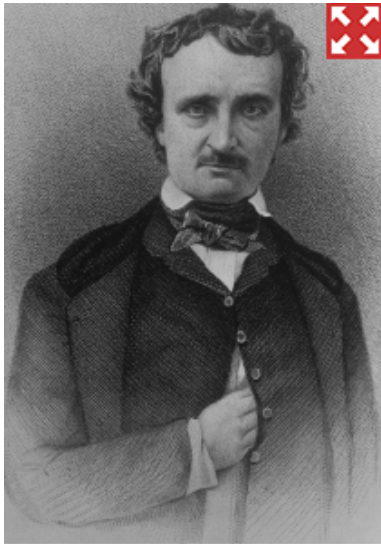
Where the Elastic City tours are fanciful, the ones run by the Municipal Art Society are grounded in history. On Aug. 22, you can explore “EL Doctorow in The Bronx,” which retraces the late writer’s childhood neighborhood of Mount Eden. Or head out to Staten Island on Aug. 23 for a “Snug Harbor History Tour,” hitting the grounds’ wealth of Greek Revival buildings. Most walks are \$20, \$15 for members; mas.org.



A still from 1982's "Annie."

Photo: Columbia

Fans of the macabre, rejoice: Boroughs of the Dead dwells on the dark side — like combing the West Village haunts beloved of both Poe and Lovecraft (Aug. 20 and 29). But you might opt for the new “Haunting Histories and Legends of Astoria” on Aug. 22. Turns out the nabe has a spooky past complete with haunted Victorian mansions and a potter’s field — who knew? Most walks are \$20; boroughsofthedead.com.



Edgar Allan Poe

Photo: Getty Images

As its name indicates, the nonprofit Shorewalkers focuses on NYC’s waterfront. And there’s a lot of it — the group’s annual “Great Saunter,” in May, is 32 miles long. The rest of the walks are much shorter, like the 8-mile “Crack Is Wack,” which explores the history of graffiti (Aug. 22), or the 12-mile, self-explanatory “Triboro to Queensboro” (Aug. 29). Walks are either free or require a membership, just \$20 a year; shorewalkers.org.




Visit Hasidim’s tours of Williamsburg’s Orthodox community aren’t cheap, but the \$50 fee includes food tasting at two locations, as well as knowledge and access — founder Frieda Vizel grew up in the area and gives cultural and social insights into a neighborhood now more identified with trustafarians. visithasidim.com.







September 26, 2014

The Brian Lehrer Show

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Todd Shalom
(Courtesy of Elastic City)

Todd Shalom, founder of the "participatory walks" organization Elastic City and **Niegel Smith**, a performance artist and theater director, talk about the inaugural **Elastic City Walks Festival**, the "participatory walks" art form, and the first-ever walks festival, which will take place in outdoor locations throughout the city September 26 - October 7.

a sample art walk with Todd Shalom:



ELASTIC CITY

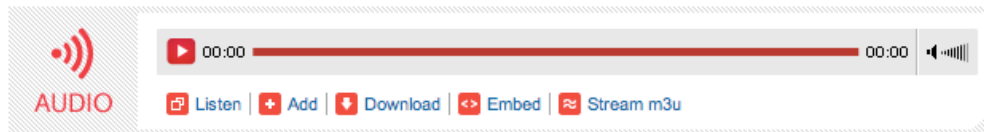


JULY 14, 2010

Hidden City: WNYC Wanders Through Brighton Beach

Wednesday, July 14, 2010 - 05:08 PM

By [Carolina A. Miranda](#)



See the City through the eyes (and ears) of an artist. Above, an image from the Elastic City sound walk in Brighton Beach. ([Todd Shalom/Elastic City](#))

“ Since May, Elastic City has organized outings that have explored vintage typography in Williamsburg, the monuments of downtown Manhattan and even the soundscape of gay New York (complete with a visit to an adult video store).

In a city that is all sensory overload — teeming sidewalks, roaring trains, tricked out cruisers blaring reggaeton — it becomes practically a matter of survival to be selective about what we choose to see and hear. We put on iPods. We bury our nose in a book. We simply block it out.

But the artists of [Elastic City](#) — a Brooklyn-based outfit that leads experiential walks in search of art and imagery — wants you to do just the opposite. They want to get you to listen (closely) to the drone of air-conditioning units and the calls of street vendors. **And to help debut their newest walk of Brighton Beach, they have extended a special invite to eight WNYC listeners.**

Elastic City is led by New York-born poet and performance artist Todd Shalom, who has organized a group of artists to lead sensory examinations of the city. Since May, they have

organized group outings exploring [vintage typography](#) in Williamsburg, [the monuments of downtown Manhattan](#) and even the [soundscape of gay New York](#) (complete with a visit to an adult video store). One artist, in fact, is in the process of developing a walk inspired by the concept of

BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES

ELASTIC CITY



JULY 14, 2010

[homesickness](#). These outings, says Shalom, are about recreating the wonder you feel anytime you are in a new place — where scents, sights, sounds and language are totally fresh.

This month, Shalom and Elastic City are debuting a new walk devoted to the soundscape of [Brighton Beach](#) that is inspired by the work of futurist poet [Aleksei Kruchenykh](#), a Ukrainian figure who was dedicated to exploring the sounds words made, rather than their meaning. We're jonesing to go, and thought it would be great to have **eight WNYC listeners** join us for this special listening experience.

The tour will take place on Saturday, July 24th at 6pm in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Since this is a special outing, the folks at Elastic City have even waved the fee (usually \$25). If you'd like to come along, **leave a comment telling us why you'd like to participate**. I'll be there, along with one of the station's ultra-fabulous videographers, who will be on hand to record the spectacle. In the meantime, you can find all manner of details related to the walk right [here](#).

See you on the 24th!



Todd Shalom/Elastic City

Elastic City's artist-led walks are about drawing attention to the city's overlooked experiences. Above, a brightly-painted Russian cafe in Brighton Beach.

<http://culture.wnyc.org/blogs/gallerina/2010/jul/14/elastic-city-and-wnyc/>

July 27, 2016

NEWS

After Seven Years, a Magical Series of City Walks Hangs Up Its Laces



This Is My Worst Nightmare by Becca Blackwell (photo: Eric McNatt)

In the city, or in any city, streets aren't just streets, and buildings aren't just buildings. There are histories stacked on top of each other, whether they be literal populations and businesses that come and go or more personal, emotional histories. A park or a street corner is going to mean something different to everyone.

For the past few years, [Elastic City](#) has striven to crystalize this feeling into something more tangible with its series of free artist-led participatory walks in New York City and beyond. These walks take small groups (usually 12 or less) on fictional, historical, emotional journeys, such as a reenactment of coming-of-age moments that occurred at the height of the West Village's dyke bar culture, a singalong *Annie* tour, or renaming and imagining a neighborhood where immigrants are celebrated. Artists like scenic designer Mimi Lien (a winner of the MacArthur "Genius Grant"), performance artist Karen Finley, activist and urbanist Nisan Haymian, among many others, have created and led walks for the series.

Today, Elastic City will wrap up their walk series for good. I chatted with Elastic City founder Todd Shalom and his longtime collaborator (and Elastic City's Associate Artistic

<http://bedfordandbowery.com/2016/07/after-seven-years-a-magical-series-of-city-walks-hangs-up-its-laces/>

BEDFORD + BOWERY

July 27, 2016

Director) Niegel Smith in the time they had in between conducting walks. Today, for the last several times, they'll lead the walk they've created together that will serve as a finale for the series. It's called, fittingly, The Last Walk, and takes place in Prospect Park, beginning at Grand Army Plaza.



DADDY WARBUCKS, PLEASE ADOPT ME (A.K.A. THE ANNIE TOUR!) by Erin Markey (photo: Kate Glicksberg)

“This is the last walk,” Shalom says. “Literally. It’s instructions from artists from their past walks that we think fit together. I’m very careful not to say this is a greatest hits because I don’t want to put down any of the other artists. This walk deals issues of memorializing, with queering space, sensory exploration, shadow play.”

“On this last walk, we have a bunch of different artists: a choreographer, a video artist, a comic/performance artist, an urban planner, a sound artist,” adds Smith. “We have all these different perspectives. We’ve taken the prompts from these artists and put them together, so we’re re-performing the prompts for the public. And there are surprises.” Elastic City’s website notes that “your clothes might get a little dirty on The Last Walk.”

Both agree that creating and participating in walks throughout the five boroughs has tangibly affected how they see and experience public space, as well as the ways they approach creating participatory performance and artwork.

<http://bedfordandbowery.com/2016/07/after-seven-years-a-magical-series-of-city-walks-hangs-up-its-laces/>

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Memory Palace by Mimi Lien (photo: Eric McNatt)

“It’s rare that I walk the city now without the memories of walking with other people,” says Smith. “The city is so layered for me,” Shalom adds. “I grew up outside of the city, coming into the city a lot, moved here after college to Manhattan, then to Brooklyn. Going into Manhattan is so layered: that diner over there is where I came out to my father, that building over there is where I was working during 9/11. The walks are just another layer. Like, oh, over there I know that manhole sounds like that when you go over it. It’s a really strange and particular and individual knowledge I have from these walks.”



Spread by Todd Shalom and Niegel Smith (photo: Caitlin Ruttle)

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They specifically recall one of their past walk collaborations in 2013, co-presented by the organization [Visual AIDS](#). It was called Spread, and explored just that, whether it be spreading jam, spreading rumors, or spreading a physical group of people throughout a space. Participants moved “like a virus,” attempted to spread feelings and gestures to strangers, and stripped down to their underwear in a privately-owned public plaza. A security officer tried to tell them they were not allowed to remove any clothing, but they stood their ground, and the officer ended up apologizing to them for being wrong. “I think we created a very aggressive moment of de-clothing, but not becoming naked, in a publicly-owned private space. It’s questioning what can we share with others,” says Smith.

Shalom feels that ending the festival is in part because they’ve completed their mission of bringing these experiential participatory walks to people’s consciousness as something they can partake in and even create. “We really wanted a celebratory ending that was personal and was looking back but really focused on the moving forward, the moving forward together, creating new experiences,” he says. “The question of Elastic City isn’t one that ends with the project, the project has been an introduction about how to be more intentional about the creativity we have in our space.”

Though Elastic City is formally ending as a festival, they’re working on a book that will serve as a manual for those who would like to create their own walks, which Shalom hopes will be completed next year.

“Every situation in your control has the potential to be a creative one,” says Smith. “I’m sorry to get emotional, but I have to contain it, because I have like, five more walks.”

Elastic City’s The Last Walk, created by Todd Shalom and Niegel Smith in collaboration with luciana achugar, Chiara Bernasconi, Michelle Boulé, Neil Freeman, Neil Goldberg, Wayne Koestenbaum, Erin Markey, and Pamela Z, continues at 4pm and 7pm today. More info on Elastic City and past walks [here](#).

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October 15, 2014

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Elastic City Walks

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Sign up for an **Elastic City Walk** and you may be asked, in the words of founder Todd Shalom, to “collectively sing the shape of the skyline, construct visual poems from objects we find on the street, and make monuments with our bodies in response to the monuments we find in public space.” Shalom conceived of this project as a way to encourage more poetic interaction with one’s surroundings, and each walk takes

participants through a number of artistically inspired exercises while they explore a small section of the metropolis. Shalom leads several walks himself and works with artists who devise their own based on their medium and expertise: You might get a lesson in perspective from an aerial artist or explore civic identity with an urban activist. If activities feel uncomfortable initially, they quickly break the ice between strangers — many of the walks end with a spontaneous group dinner or drink. No matter what direction your stroll heads, it’ll likely give you a fresh way of looking at dynamic New York City.

This Week in New York

Edited by Amy Plitt • thisweek@timeoutny.com



Todd Shalom at Greenwich Avenue

Why I love NYC: Todd Shalom

The artist and Elastic City founder reveals the spots in New York that inspire him. By **Linnea Covington**

As the founder of Elastic City (elastic-city.com), which leads abstract walking tours, artist-poet Todd Shalom spends plenty of time conceiving new and interesting ways for people to see New York City. He started the company in 2010, after running a series of similar jaunts in San Francisco. Shalom asks artists to create their own imaginative journeys through the five boroughs, which has led to such tours as Through the Cracks, a sound-based walk through Manhattan's former Tin Pan Alley area. This weekend, artist Neil Freeman leads the Solar Alignment Walk (Sat 20, Sun 21, Aug 27, 28 at 1pm; \$20), which will explore how the sun synchronizes with the city. In anticipation of those journeys, we asked Shalom to share some of his favorite spots in NYC.

KIOSK

"There is nothing like stepping into an open door. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to see what was upstairs here. It's a well-curated amalgamation of items gathered from the owners' travels. They buy the goods in semibulk from the source and sell them in the store. The last time I was there, I picked up a Audubon birdcall whistle (\$10) and super-minty Portuguese toothpaste (\$9)." *95 Spring St between Broadway and Mercer St, second floor (212-226-8601, kioskiosk.com). Mon-Sat 11am-7pm.*

Marble Hill

"My dad grew up in the projects of Marble Hill [a neighborhood across the Harlem River from Inwood] and he hadn't been back in more than 50 years. We returned this spring with my sister. I couldn't get over all the stairways in the neighborhood and the long, wide columns. [Those] make it a perfect performance space."

Blue Roost Petite Café

"This is my local haunt, and they serve homemade Southern fare. For breakfast, I often get the Irish porridge with bananas and syrup (\$5.50), and for lunch, the sprouted avocado sandwich (\$8). And then there's the peach pie (\$3). Also, the space is perfect for intimate conversations, a striking contrast to the chaos of Flatbush Avenue." *539 Flatbush Ave between Lincoln Rd and Maple Ave, Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn (646-397-6678). Mon-Fri 8am-9pm; Sat 8:30am-9pm; Sun 8:30am-8pm.*



Blue Roost Petite Café



Splatterpool artspace



KIOSK



Blue Roost Petite Café

Splatterpool artspace

"In 2010, my friend Kelly Armendariz started Splatterpool, an art space dedicated to experimental visual and performance work by both local and international artists. It gets support through Good Iron House Bed and Breakfast, which Kelly, an architect and designer, helped build. [He] made it an affordable, rustic home for out-of-towners." *138 Bayard St between Manhattan and Graham Aves, Williamsburg, Brooklyn (917-412-9220, splatterpool.com)*

Cafe Kashkar

"This cafe serves Uighur cuisine and is a Brighton Beach treasure. I discovered it while I was creating last season's Brighton Zaum walk; [I stopped there] because of its festive orange awning. The lamb kebabs (\$4) are amazing, but you can also trust the staff to

order for you. You can pick up some vodka down the street and mix it with their mixed-fruit drink (\$2)." *1141 Brighton Beach Ave between Brighton 14th and 15th Sts, Brighton Beach, Brooklyn (718-743-3832). Mon-Sun 9am-11pm.*

Greenwich Avenue between 11th and Bank Streets

"I once kissed a guy here, [so] this spot has stayed with me. The triangular dimples of the St. Vincent's materials-handling building make it great too. Juan Betancurth and I centered our Lucky Walk around the neighborhood; on the walk we rid spaces of bad luck and bring forth good luck. One way we do this is by playing off architectural features in the neighborhood: At the triangular building we proceed with caution, since that's one thing a triangle represents. We also whisper wishes inside an empty utility box that's attached to the building and pick up our wish on the other side after it has been 'generated' by the building."

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Elastic City treats walking as a way of art



Elastic City walkers observe the subways (Caitlin Ruttle)



By Jillian Steinhauer 2:45 p.m. | Jun. 21, 2012

FOLLOW THIS REPORTER

It was a warm, sunny Saturday afternoon last month, and I was standing with fifteen strangers on a pathway in Prospect Park, getting ready to smell them.

It was a moderately diverse group—mostly white, but not entirely, mostly in their 20s and 30s, but not entirely—and, amassed in a small clump, listening to our leader for the afternoon, dance artist [Miguel Gutierrez](#) (pictured below), instruct on exploring one's sense of smell. We were on a walk with Gutierrez, doing exercises called "sense work" to better understand our bodies and our interaction with the world. So far we'd covered hearing and sight; smell was up.

"I want you to walk around and smell each other," Gutierrez said. "This is something we don't usually do with strangers."

"You have to get *real* close to smell someone," he added.

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And so I found myself approaching people whom I knew only to the extent of their first names, and smelling them. Nose in frizzy hair, nose hovering over exposed neck, nose near sweaty armpit: one by one, we stopped and sniffed each

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other. Like dogs meeting on the street, we began hesitantly, but the weirdness wore off quickly—after all, we'd been doing unusual things for 45 minutes already, including taking turns walking with our eyes closed as open-eyed partners lead us through the park and spending a few minutes trying to go “micro with sound” by honing in on  a particular sound or way of listening.

I was smelling people like crazy but not getting very far with my efforts; I decided I must have a disappointingly weak nose. At one point, a man came over and sniffed me, then tried to pinpoint the pleasant scent emanating from somewhere on my body. After a few wrong guesses, I solved the mystery for him.

“It’s my shampoo,” I said. “I took a shower this morning.” In my head, I added, “Good thing.”

THAT SATURDAY, OUR GROUP SPENT an hour and a half smelling, touching, covering and closing our eyes, tasting, and walking with a heightened awareness of all our senses. The event was a “sensewalk” called “Everything Is New” that Gutierrez created for [Elastic City](#) (the first of four sensewalks he led this summer). Elastic City was founded by artist Todd Shalom in 2010 to commission artists from various mediums to make and lead urban walks—not walking tours, but walks.

“Tours are about things,” Shalom explained when we spoke at Sweet Revenge in the West Village last month. “Tours are generally fact-based information about something, whereas the walks are the thing.”

But just as they are not information-centric tours, Elastic City's walks are also not aimless wandering; they are highly structured endeavors. An Elastic City walk is, really, an experience, or a set of experiences. A participant may, as I did, find herself smelling her companions or trying to see with her eyes closed. She may find herself, as I did on another occasion, underground considering the “ecosystem” that is the NYC subways with artist [Neil Goldberg](#): watching people’s hair flail in the wind of arriving trains and spying on passengers as they run for and miss their trains.

The walks can be bigger, too: Last year, theater and performance artist Niegel Smith—who is on the Elastic City board—led a walk called “Total Detroit,” which, at a cost of \$200 each, brought participants to Detroit (Smith’s hometown) for three days on a ritualistic, healing journey.

“It’s so easy to get pulled into destination,” said Smith when we spoke at Troost in Greenpoint several weeks ago, “so to have a form that is actually about *how* we get from point A to point B.... Walks have a beginning and an end, but it’s only about what happens in between.”

Both Shalom and Smith, who are frequent collaborators, see the walk as an art form, an artistic medium in and of itself. This notion, Shalom said, has “been around in different ways. The Situationists, their idea was the [dérive](#)—this idea of getting lost in the city then

finding yourself anew.” He also mentioned a handful of arts festivals that, in recent years, have devoted themselves to the theme of walking or hosted artists who’ve done walks as performances.

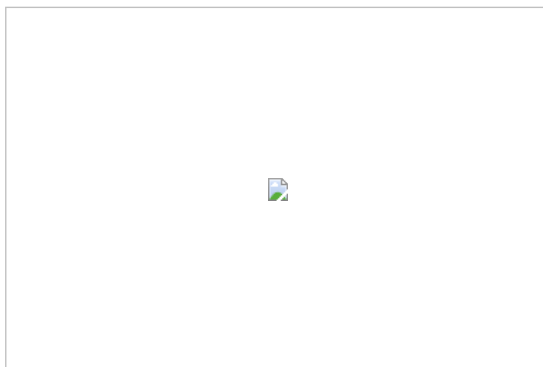
To that list, one might add the walk that performance artist Marina Abramović did with her longtime partner, Ulay, in 1988, to end their relationship. Each started at a different end of the Great Wall of China, and when they met in the middle, they said goodbye. And while it’s unclear if he considers himself an artist, former civil engineer Matt Green is [currently walking every street in New York City](#), after having walked across the entire United States.

But if walking as a kind of performance art—which, in keeping with the tenets of that medium, is often durational and focused on the performer—is not an entirely new concept, Shalom sees Elastic City and the work it does as utterly unique.

“As far as I know, nothing like Elastic City has happened before,” he said. “In other words, there have been people who have given walks as part of their artwork, or given themed walks, but there’s never been an organization that has taken artists from one genre specifically to bring them to this other one.”

NEIL GOLDBERG IS A PHOTOGRAPHER AND VIDEO ARTIST whose muse is the subway.

His [current exhibition](#) at the Museum of the City of New York (Through July 4) features pictures of trapezoidal patches of sky shot at subway entrances and videos of people’s faces as they emerge from underground and tentatively look around, pausing to get their bearings.



“Moments that are overlooked, moments that we’ve decided don’t matter—I feel like our lives are constituted of those moments,” Goldberg (pictured in green jacket at right) told us at the beginning of his walk. And so we descended—12 of us, another somewhat mixed bunch, including a couple from Adelaide, Australia, and a retired Federal Aviation Administration worker from Howard Beach, Queens—to the subway to try and witness some of those moments.

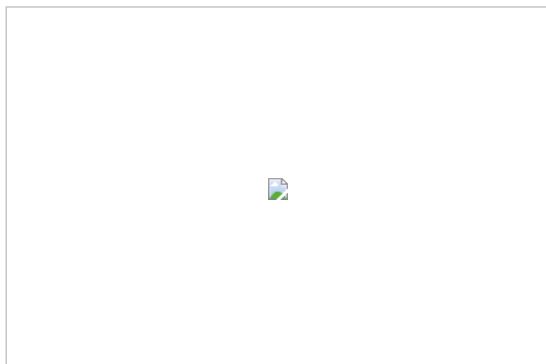
One of our first stops was the West 4th Street station, where we congregated in the no-man’s-land platform that sits between the two levels of trains, the B/D/F/M line rumbling below our feet, the A/C/E above our heads.

“This is the quintessential space that isn’t supposed to matter,” Goldberg said. As such, he wanted us to stop there and watch people as they moved across it. He wanted us to see what happens “when you spend time in a space that you’re supposed to purely pass through.”

Each of us staked out a pole. Commuters appeared, hustling up a flight of stairs or crossing from one side of the space to the other, or pausing, confused for a minute, as they tried to determine which way to go. There was a firm distance between us and them, and the effect was wonderfully poetic, like watching actors or dancers play out a

choreographed scene. One member of our group compared the poles scattered throughout the space to the wings of a stage.

While watching I was struck by how self-involved we become during this underground rite of travel, how unaware we often are of our surroundings and the people with whom we share them. We assume that no one is watching us, because we're not watching them. I wondered where these people were going: who they were planning to meet, who they were hoping to meet, if it was the end of their day or just the beginning.



“If a person can walk away with one new perspective on how to experience the everyday,” Shalom had said in our interview a few days earlier, “then I think it’s been successful.”

HOW DO YOU CRAFT AN IMMERSIVE perambulatory experience for a group of people? How do you help them, in Smith’s

words, “reclaim the freedom of experience”?

Shalom characterized his approach to Elastic City as very “hands on.” After commissioning the artists, he helps them develop their concept by discussing ideas with them and working on descriptions. Next come the logistics and practicalities, for which Shalom rehearses the walks with all the artists and goes on everyone’s first walk. He tries to consider even the smallest details, like which side of the street a group should be on.

“I’m coming to it from three positions,” he said. “As a fellow artist, so I’m interested in that the concept is strong; a participant’s perspective, like, ‘What am I going to expect to find on the walk?’; and then also as an administrator: Are we doing stuff that’s safe? As opposed to wearing blindfolds, we should just instruct people to close their eyes.”

Pace, according to Smith, is as another key element of walk-making.

“Tempo is something we think a lot about. It’s like a score, cause you’re scoring people’s experience. How much time do you spend in one place, given another?”

And both artists mentioned the importance of a walk’s arc, which Smith described as “a shift, some kind of reversal or reflection.” This is the “aha” moment, the turning point when participants cross over from ordinary people to hyper-observers or -experiencers of life (whether they realize it at the time or not).

“One of the cruxes of making a good walk is having that moment where you’ve turned the world on its head or you’ve opened up a different point of view, so that by the end you’re then seeing or experiencing in a different way,” Smith said.

Part of this experience, and part of what makes Elastic City singular, is the accessibility of the artists; because they are leading the walk themselves, participants have an extended opportunity to interact with them. Usually when we experience someone’s art, we take it in passively, standing in a gallery or sitting in a theater. Even with performance art, which often involves the audience in some way, the relationship is fairly one-sided and weighted towards the artist. Traditional modes of art-making call for the creator to simply make a

work and release it into the world, after which it's out of their hands. Viewers then quietly accept or reject it.

When an artist makes and leads a walk, however, he has more flexibility, a chance to shape the piece on the spot. At the same time, viewers become participants, more open to a new vision of the world because they can see and interact with the artist leading them. Trust is established.


"The walks are like a series of instructions," said Shalom. "But they're amenable, they're personally engaged, and they're adaptable. It's not like, 'You read this and do it.' It's more like, 'I'm going to offer this to you, and if you have questions, we can always amend it, or we'll see.' It's a dialogue."

In fact, that dialogue may end up being more important than the walking itself. This year, in its third season, Elastic City has started a new program of what Shalom calls "ways"; these are essentially walks—interactive experiences and workshops led by artists—without the walking.

"There were artists that were coming up with walk ideas that were getting a bit more factual," he said. "Or their craft didn't necessarily lend itself to walking around, but it's still really valuable and can help us understand our relationship to the city, our relationship to each other."

This summer six artists, including Shalom, are offering ways, and another 20 or so are giving walks. One walk or way costs \$20, a price that is reasonable for participants but still not quite sustaining for Elastic City. Even if the season sells out, the money raised from walks and ways won't come close to covering the organization's operating expenses, Shalom said. Elastic City is in an awkward but familiar transitional phase—expanding, gaining momentum, and in the process of becoming a certified 501(c)(3) nonprofit, but still not bringing in enough money to hire full-time staff or rent office space (his apartment serves as headquarters for now).

"We're not in the best economic times to keep expanding, or to be raising prices, or to be asking people for money," he said. "It's not easy. I don't know where this thing can succeed right now in the world. But New York's a good bet."

IT WAS NEARING THE END OF OUR SENSEWALK, and we'd just spent a few short  minutes lying in the hot grass in the meadow at Prospect Park. As we slowly lifted ourselves up, taking note of where and how our bodies were in contact with the ground, Gutierrez explained his plan for the final 15 minutes of our walk. We would spread out and walk across the meadow, individually, each person at his or her own pace. As we went, he explained, we would practice some of the exercises we'd learned and play with the interaction of our senses.

"Notice that the fader-board of the senses can shift," Gutierrez said.

We spread out and began to walk, all of us taking our time, trying to retain the heightened awareness we'd been building. Like many others, I walked barefoot, trying to really feel the grass underneath my feet. I stopped a few times to lie down or smell the ground; I walked backwards for a while and then briefly with my eyes closed; I jumped and ran and then plodded along slowly. I heard an airplane overhead and strained to catch the sound of the wind in the trees.

At one point, I was listening so well to the world around me that I heard a young man on the periphery of the meadow telling his friend to check out the “zombie horde of people.” He was sticking out his arms for comedic effect. I smiled because I knew he'd gotten it backwards. We weren't zombies anymore.

A full list of Elastic City's summer walks is available [here](#). The next walk, Andrew Mount's 'Character,' takes place tonight and on June 27. All images by Caitlin Ruttle except top and bottom images, both by Jillian Steinhauer.

MORE: [CULTURE](#) [ELASTIC CITY](#) [MIGUEL GUTIERREZ](#) [NEIL GOLDBERG](#) [NIEGEL SMITH](#) [TODD SHALOM](#) [WALKING TOUR](#)



Author: Jillian Steinhauer

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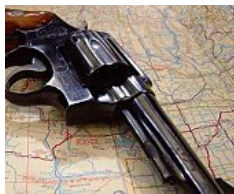
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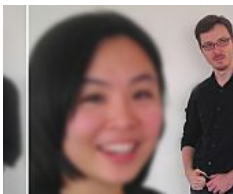
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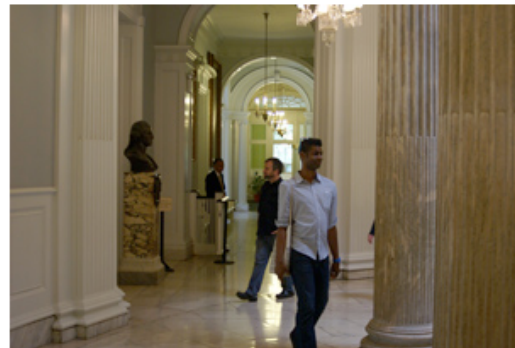
JULY 12, 2010

ARTSEEN

Walking the Elastic City

by Patricia Milder

Becoming suddenly conscious of time and place can inspire melancholy. The experience can also be pleasing, or beautiful; Todd Shalom calls this “heightened awareness.” He says he felt it most profoundly when he was traveling, living for long stretches in Israel and Argentina. The first glimmer of an idea for Elastic City, his Brooklyn-based art-walk company, came when he was semi-delusional, high on altitude sickness in the mountains of Peru. Now he’s curating the walks in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and while they might not change your life, it’s refreshing to find a deliberately constructed experience—a performance—that exists just for itself, or just for you. No one here is begging for an institutional stamp of approval, and yet the walks don’t exist in a vacuum, either.



“Follow the Leader” walk with Nigel Smith. Photo by Algirdas Sabaliauskas.

When I asked if there was some conversation to be had between what he did on the street and what was going on in museums, galleries, and performance venues, Shalom mentioned Marina Abramović at MoMA. I realized, when he started talking, that I couldn’t stand to hear any more about Abramović from anyone (at least for a while). I regretted asking the question. I wondered if he had a boyfriend. Then I felt guilty for wondering that. I tried to focus on the Abramović connection, but then he started talking about Twitter. I was distracted. I apologized, saying, “I keep losing my train of thought. I keep listening to everything on the street. That’s what’s happening to me. Because of the walk, it’s true.”

I meant his “Carroll Street Soundwalk,” which he had just taken me on. It was post-walk; the two of us sat on stools in front of a café on Fourth Avenue. We were drinking tea and watching cars and people pass by. A friend on her way to a talk on experimental Jewish poetics rode up to us on a bike. When she told us about the talk, I found out that Shalom had studied poetry, too: “I felt like poetry needed to live off the page for me in performance in some sort of way,” he said. “The words themselves weren’t expressing all I had to express.” My phone rang and I answered it. Kids played around on their skateboards for a while at the curb.

Only a couple of hours before, I met Shalom and a few other people in Carroll Park, where he told us that the only rules on the walk were that we had to silence our cell phones and refrain from talking. We followed him past the basketball courts and then down Carroll Street as he pointed out sounds; the idea, it seemed, was just to notice them. At one point he mentioned that when John Cage and Merce Cunningham lived in an apartment together in SoHo, Cage threw out his records and said that when he wanted to hear music, he just opened his window. When I listened, the neighborhood sounds quickly transformed. It wasn’t much of a stretch to hear them as music.

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About halfway through the walk I began to feel as if I couldn't see so well anymore. Or maybe I didn't want to see. Seeing was distracting attention away from the "soundscape," a term coined by the acoustic ecologists that means pretty much what it implies: the landscape of sound. Shalom told us to pair off; a stranger watched me walk down the street with my eyes closed, taking responsibility for keeping me safe. He didn't touch me as I walked, but every now and again I would hear him say, "here's a curb," in some thick, European accent. He had a nice voice. I tried not to wonder anything about him, accepting, instead, my own heightened state of vulnerability—watched but unable to see. I directed my mind even deeper into listening: for cars, for the breeze in the trees, and for my caretaker's sometimes quiet warnings about walls to my left and broken glass in my path.

Those two hours later, then, as I was sitting and chatting with Shalom on stools on Fourth Avenue., my ears were still open—more open than I can remember them ever being—and the sounds of the city were distracting me. This, he said, is one of his greatest joys to hear. "I remember giving a sound walk in Tel Aviv," he told me, "and I got a phone call the next day saying, 'I'm walking down the street and I'm hearing things that I don't normally pay attention to.' And that was the best compliment that one could give me." In this way, the walks can be interpreted as educational, though not overtly so.

The essential politic inherent in each walk is subtly recognizable but so experientially based that there is room for every participant to have his or her own private reaction. Niegel Smith, the other half (with Shalom) of the performance group PERMISO, and the creator and leader of popular Elastic City walks "Follow the Leader" and "Monumental Walk," says that this is actually one of the most important components of his walks. "My walks are political statements in as much as I'm saying we need access to these spaces, but I want to give space for each person to create their own dialogue around that."

My own dialogue about public spaces during "Follow the Leader," Smith's walk in lower Manhattan, went kind of like this: It's amazing how deeply ingrained my obedience to the symbolic authoritative gesture has become. I'd rather refrain from questioning than deal, on any level, with an armed guard. Further, the parallels with this in my personal life are alarming—I'd rather talk aesthetics. When we spoke after the walk, I tried to understand, again, where this sort of site-specific experience fit into the performance landscape. We were on the grass in City Hall Park, doing that leisurely kind of park-sitting that's almost like laying down, but isn't quite:

"Carroll Street Soundwalk" with Todd Shalom. Photo by Russell Austin.

Rail: I noticed, in both walks, these really interesting moments of aesthetic awareness. So let's speak of this as performance, like what makes "Follow the Leader" a performance and not just a lesson about government and public spaces? Watching, for example, each participant walk so closely behind the passerby he chose to follow—I felt so aware witnessing that. It's very beautiful to see everyone else's little pair and to be in step with them as well.

Todd Shalom: That's actually referencing Vito Acconci's "Following Piece."



"Carroll Street Soundwalk" with Todd Shalom. Photo by Russell Austin.

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Niegel Smith: But even more rudimentary than that, it goes all the way back to the principles of aesthetic design. The one I hold on to the most is repetition, which is how we get to ritual. Literally seeing an object repeated draws our attention to that object: seeing the lines, the form, the color, the shape, the momentum.

Shalom: I'm thinking of the concept itself of following someone in public, whereas you're looking to all of these different components, and both ideas are present.

Rail: So there are intentionally layered art historical and design references happening the whole time.

Smith: Yes. But it's also curious to me, because I started in the theater and later found out that a lot of my theater stuff had actually come from the visual arts world. I started to see that the theater is far behind visual art, and all these principles that we've been working out of came from performance art.

Smith then told me a bit about his theater background, which made me realize just how precisely directed the experience he had just led us through really was. "11 Tony Nominations!" he exclaimed and raised his hands up over his head—he's the assistant director of FELA! on Broadway. He also recently directed *Neighbors at the Public*, and says that the most exciting thing about theater is that the audience is actually present. It's easy to forget, in the rarified live-art world, how infrequently "liveness" actually occurs in most popular entertainment forms (theater being the exception, as Smith points out). On these walks, the audience is present, and they're also participants.

The concept reminds me a little of Sharon Hayes's street performances—the "Love Addresses"—though Shalom and Smith don't admit to being on as direct a mission as she is to confront "the public." Hayes sees two specific audiences: her performance, she knows, will be different for each group. There are those who come specifically to see her (and the reactions of those just passing by), and passersby who don't know who she is or why she's speaking into a microphone about her lover and current events (or why a small group is attentively listening to her speak). Passersby during Elastic City walks like "Follow the Leader," who inevitably notice the participants at some point, are acknowledged by the artists, but never directly confronted. The work is not meant to offend them—this is to the artists' credit. In a performance world where offensive behavior often seems rote, it's refreshing to see people filling spaces with productive and energizing ideas.

Shalom and Smith started working together in 2006 as PERMISO (the name comes from the Spanish term for "permit me," essentially used to barge one's way into a situation), creating a shared vocabulary that combined free form performance art ideas with theatrical structure. They have a manifesto, cheekily titled "Our Core Values," which includes a commitment to never create work inside or in private spaces. Elastic City is Shalom's baby, though, and in addition to including as many of Smith's walks in the program as Smith is willing to give, he's curated walks in this first season led by artists he has, on some occasions, sought out and coached in the form. Neil Freeman, an artist whose work focuses on cities, lists, and maps, gives a micro-level view of the streets in Bushwick combined with a bird's-eye view. Daniel Neumann, a German-born sound artist, gives a soundwalk in DUMBO, under the bridges.

As with everything about this small company—only a business because it "needed to be"—choosing artists and concepts for walks is more personal than strategic. "What do I want to explore?" and, "how can I find

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the experts?” are the guiding questions. A more body-focused walk led by a downtown choreographer or dancer is still on Shalom’s wish list, as well as a strictly text-based walk led by a poet. There might be a scent-walk in the works, led by a rosarian, and if it’s starting to sound shticky—exploring the senses!—don’t worry, he’s conscious enough of the danger.

I’m the first to run from gimmicks and insincerity, but there’s something about the way Shalom talks about his walks, which are sometimes one-man experiences, that makes me trust that he’s genuinely excited about his and others’ personal, performative interactions with the less dramatic bits of living. (This is, after all, a guy who wanted to create a gay zine entitled “Snuggle.”) Why else would someone do a solo walk through the suburbs on a rainy day, snapping photos and re-imagining childhood memories? Or advertise a free walk over the Brooklyn Bridge—one time only, for one person only—to mark his first time crossing that particular monument? “In doing this thing that I really want to do, am I their escort or are they mine?” Shalom wonders.

Smith also develops walks around his own interests and experiences. Upcoming for him is a walk through Harlem, designed to unearth tensions between black culture and counterculture, titled “This Ain’t Yo’ Mama’s Walk.” Both performers expressed a need to inhabit their own discomfort in the walks, which is why the performances have short runs and new ideas are continuously in development:

Shalom: If I don’t feel nervous before a performance, then I’m over it.

Rail: Then you’re just going through the motions... Though it seems these walks give you a lot of opportunity to feel nervous.

Smith: I can’t wait to do “Monumental Walk” in a cemetery, which actually came up because I had a make-out session in a cemetery once and it was one of the most intense, wonderful making out sessions I’ve ever had.

Rail: Because it’s a little scary?

Smith: It’s a little scary, but it’s also this pristine, Victorian landscape.

Shalom: I’ve never made out in a cemetery actually, have you?

Rail: Um...no.

Smith: It’s really hot. Maybe it will be a couple’s walk. Maybe you’ll have to bring someone to make out with.

And there you have it: what I’d want to understand as a queer, participatory (not to mention economically morbid, as in “you can’t take it with you”) response to Tino Sehgal’s politically backward “The Kiss” (2002), is first about nervousness, personal experience, and specifically, how fun it is to make out. For the record, however, Shalom shot the couple’s walk part of that idea down. His exact words were, “No, no, no,”—but still, you never know.

<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2010/07/artseen/walking-the-elastic-city>