

PYLON

“Beside Ourselves, Sometimes”

by Kris Cohen

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Déjà vu, paranoia, the feeling that you’ve suddenly stepped into a movie, spacing out, thinking one word and saying another, getting caught in the frame of someone else’s photograph, feeling regret, feeling optimism, looking at your own photographs, being addressed by an advertisement, using a map, wanting.... How many of our most ordinary experiences involve being caught, suspended, between one image of ourselves and another? When this suspension feels bad, feels paralysing, people start to complain about technology (they talk about surveillance, spectacle, deadening irony, the “waning of affect”¹). When this suspension feels good, liberating, radical, people start to idealise technology (they talk about democracy, more open and inclusive publics, freedom from constraining identities, access). But each of the items in the litany with which I began stands as evidence that such images do more than distance us from ourselves; do more than simply deaden us to life as it happens elsewhere. Rather, they cluster around individuals, sometimes clotting and sometimes lubricating and sometimes bizarrely misdirecting the ways we become personal and impersonal, known and anonymous, and so they mediate our relations to publics, to others. Hamilton and Southern’s work is about life in suspension, ordinary life caught between versions of itself, although not necessarily stuck there.

The two most recurrent and most obvious elements of Hamilton and Southern’s work together are walks and records of walks. The walks are sometimes taken by volunteers—the work’s audience-participants—and they are sometimes taken by the artists themselves. The records of walks rarely take the form of maps, even though the work always locates the walks in a known geography: Brighton, Sherwood Forest, Sherwood Village in Canada, etc. That is, the records that Hamilton and Southern make, or that they allow walks to make of themselves, are never totalising like maps—rather, they assume their form around the shape of the walk, giving priority to the idiosyncrasies of movement rather than the intelligibility of a pre-mapped space, a predictable space. To make the records, they use a Global Positioning System or GPS device in communication with a computer. In their later work, they pair the GPS device with a mobile phone in order to record and transmit the record of the walk as the walk is taking place. They developed the software that links GPS with phone in collaboration with Onteca Ltd. to produce this effect of simultaneity, of a walk occurring alongside

¹ This last phrase is Fredric Jameson’s: *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 10.

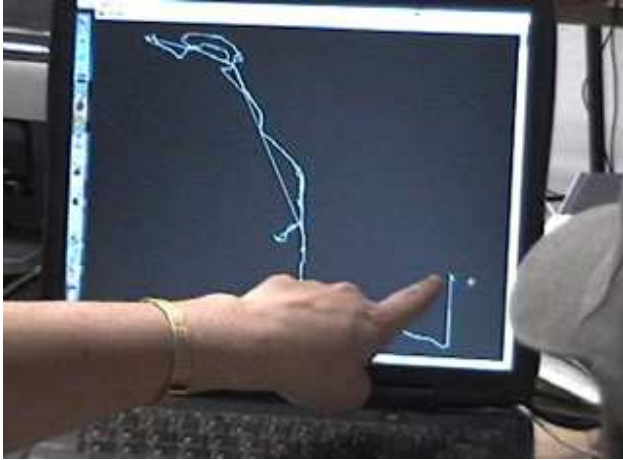
its own record. Like the system of satellites that GPS relies on, the mobile phones and the GPS receivers that they use are part of the atmosphere, that is, they are consumer products, part of a present-day ordinariness in which new technologies are no longer events but just part of the hum of day to day life. The records they produce, rendered and stored first as a digital route line, are then rendered tactile: stitched, or drawn, or laid out on the floor of the gallery in surveyor's line or suspended from the ceiling in rope. Key here is not the walks themselves, nor the records which appear in the gallery—either of which, taken alone, would place the stress on origins and destinations—but the relationship between the walks and the tactile materialisations of walks, which is the place of life in suspension. But this particular relationship is less isolatable as an element of the work and more like the work itself, so I want to be slower about producing a description of it.



A less apparent feature of the work are the stories the artists sometimes solicit from their walkers: impressions of the environments they walked through, memories of a home town, personal stories that seem to supplement the simple walking route, giving voice to a peopled geography, perhaps softening the knowledge that a map is a form of control. I say less apparent because these stories rarely appear as such in the gallery.

Nevertheless, the stories—whether solicited formally as interviews (*Satellite Bureau: Cardigan*) or provoked unexpectedly by the work (the transvestite who, upon hearing about Hamilton and Southern's work, wanted to explore the differences between his life as a man and his life as a woman, as these differences might be perceivable in his ordinary walking habits)—can never quite be explained away as mere material or process, however limited or invisible their formal role within the gallery. And this is the case because Hamilton and Southern's work is about how ordinary life is crowded with versions of itself, with imperfect memories, imperfect records, with irruptions of the past into the present, with versions of ourselves that we can no longer quite inhabit but which linger, haunting us. The stories which reside in or beside every line in Hamilton and Southern's work, and which can feel like the content or the colour of the work—which can feel like the personalising force that keeps their work from being about technology or surveillance or mapping—achieve the greater presence here for their absence. Not absent, then, but absented.

This means that formally, Hamilton and Southern's work feels calm and un-solicitous. It seems to invite quiet proximity rather than any of the more active, exuberant, or paranoid forms of beholding (decoding, being overwhelmed, being



struck or awed). In *Satellite Bureau*, the *Landlines* research, and the *Distance Made Good* projects, people are given GPS devices and they go for walks. The walks produce a record, a quiet line, and Hamilton and Southern, themselves, re-inscribe these records into another medium, as digital "collaborative maps" (*Satellite Bureau*, Neutral Ground, Regina, Canada, and Creative Mwdan Creadigol, Cardigan, Wales, 2005) or as mason's line on the floor of the gallery (*Distance Made Good: Field Study*, Dunlop Art Gallery, Sherwood Village Branch Library, Regina, Canada, 2003), or as thread wound around pegs in wooden boards (*Distance Made Good: Flow Lines*, Folly Gallery, Lancaster, UK, 2004), or as lines sewn into fabric (*Running Stitch*, Fabrica Gallery, Brighton, UK, 2006).



A walk, an inscription, a re-inscription: those are the key elements, the key moments in their work. As they appear in galleries, the lines are never supplemented by video or image or sound taken from the walks which produced the lines; there are no hand-held video cameras carried through the city (think: Vito Acconci, *Following Piece*, 1969) or up a hill (think: Janet Cardiff & Goerge Bures Miller, *Hill Climbing*, 1999) although to say this is not to imply that what precedes the gallery is merely concept or procedure, only that what is present in the gallery is all that most people see of the works. There is something ascetic, something privative, about a line in this context. What happened on all those walks? Where did people go? Did they get lost? Did they laugh? Each line, recorded in thread or pixel or rope, is the memory of a person or a walk, a story or a joke, a complaint or a confession—memories of events that happened elsewhere. In the gallery, in encounter with Hamilton and Southern's work, these memories are experienced not directly, by way of representations which feel direct and immediate, but obliquely, peripherally, in the space of suspension between versions (the walk and the line). We don't see them or hear them so much as *almost overhear* them.

In a piece called *Distance Made Good* (2002), each artist walked along pre-planned routes on the same day in their respective home countries, one in Stratford, Ontario, the other in Stratford-Upon-Avon in the UK. They coordinated their routes by matching up tourist landmarks that appear in each city and using these as waypoints for their walks: a Shakespeare Theatre in each city, an art gallery with the same name, a train station, a museum, the River Avon (a river of the same name runs through each city). Each recorded her walk using a GPS device, a process that produced simple digital lines. They then materialised these



digital lines in the gallery using rope suspended halfway between floor and ceiling, with sandbags serving as waypoints, or the points at which the two Stratfords were pressed, performatively, into adjacency. The rope as line; the line as route; the twinned routes suspended in space; the very idea of an original Stratford suspended in the remediating circuits of tourism and suspended again as the ascetic line which is like a new

crease between the two cities which already share the same name. So this representation of the route references both the walks (is a record of the walks) and the walks' prior incarnation as a GPS trace (the sandbags reference waypoints, a visual feature of GPS). In a sense, each of these moments is a version of the walk. By cross-referencing the versions, a kind of balance is established, where no version supersedes another, where no version loses its singularity (its unique existence in time and space) and where no version falls out of relation to the other versions. It is in this mutual suspension (of cities, sites, experiences) that the piece lodges its commentary about place, tourism and the redundant work of the commodity—commentary that is refracted through the ways that we find to live inside these suspensions. A walk is one such way.

“Distance made good” (DMG) is a term from navigation that means the distance presently covered. Whereas the present is always slipping into the past or being projected into the future,² DMG is a relentless present tense. To call it out is to give voice to one's situation in the present, or we could say, one's presence. But the phrase contains an echo, a faint reverberation: in DMG, there is first a distance (abstracted or projected or mapped) that precedes action or movement along that distance, and then a movement (walking, sailing, climbing, driving) that makes the distance good. The phrase suggests that the route first exists imaginatively, as a potential that is projected from an imagined future point of

² For more on the way the present tense gets crowded out by the past and the future, see Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact," Conference Proceedings "Genealogies of Biopolitics," October 2005. Available at: <http://www.radicalempricism.org/biotextes/textes/massumi.pdf>

having already covered it, and that what one does when one walks, GPS device in hand, is pass over this route. To walk is to make that distance good, to realise it, and therefore to *re*-trace it. DMG creates a present tense that one experiences, for the first time, through the re-tracing of steps—which is not the way we like to feel the romance of “the first time.” But the sense of “first” operative in DMG retains a weak tie to its halo of novelty because the distance itself and the process by which that distance is made good are not the same; they are *virtual* doubles of one another. If we think of a walk as a line, as an event that can be measured as distance made good, then is the walk a drawing or a tracing, a *sui generis* action or some kind of replay?³ In Hamilton and Southern’s work, a walk is a drawing that is haunted by a tracing. What is relentless here is our insistence on producing and experiencing the present tense as a drawing and not a trace—as if for the first time. To find our place in this present, however, is to exist within a reverberant space where a faint but busy “re-” haunts almost every experience...and might or might not overwhelm that experience. Sometimes we’re bored by repetition; sometimes it thrills us like nothing else. Imagine that you’re walking home late at night and something about the scene spooks you: if at some point during or after, you remember a film with a dark street, an ominous walk, an appropriate soundtrack, then was it the scene that spooked you or your memory of the film? Was your walk that night drawn or traced?

The German writer Robert Walser begins his story “The Walk” this way: “I have to report that one fine morning, I do not know any more for sure what time it was, as the desire to take a walk came over me, I put my hat on my head, left my writing room, or room of phantoms, and ran down the stairs to hurry out into the street.”⁴ There he finds more phantoms haunting his present, although he feels differently about these. “My steps were measured and calm, and, as far as I know, I presented, as I went on my way, a fairly dignified appearance. My feelings I like to conceal from the eyes of my fellow men, of course without any fearful strain to do so...”⁵ This is not a story about narcissism, it is the story of a walk, and a story about the storied nature of all walks. Walser’s first line, left tacit in most other fiction, begins: “I have to report...”. Likewise, Hamilton and Southern’s work never forgets its existence between versions and so never lets us forget ours. The persistent “re-” which bothers all experience is one way to understand the phantoms that “The Walk” never quite escapes. If all walks are already, in Walser’s sense, reports on those walks (and isn’t this—not the promise or threat so much as—the simple reality of GPS?), then work like Hamilton and Southern’s, which makes and records walks, is more readymade than made, more a re-mix than it is a song whose melodies sound new.

³ The distinction between drawing and tracing is from Phil Boyle, “Three Concepts for the Virtual: Diagram, Line of Flight, and Affect,” <http://www.ualberta.ca/~pboyle/theory.htm> (accessed October 30, 2006).

⁴ Walser, Robert, “The Walk,” in *Selected Stories*, Translated by John Calder (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Sometimes we feel nostalgic for our first time; sometimes we are happy to get some distance from it.

The walk Hamilton and Southern take us on in their work, from one version to another, from medium to medium, from city up to satellite and back down to the gallery by way of rope and sand or stitches in fabric, is not motivated by anything we could call a destination, be that the end of the walk or the gallery itself. This is important because so many accounts of technologically-mediated art⁶ do rely on trajectories, and particular ones: either transcendence (e.g. the hope that we might never get lost again), or grim decline (e.g. the fear that we might never get to be alone again, or have the pleasure of being lost). But when, in Hamilton and Southern's work, a walk moves from imagination to physical space through devices and satellites and into the gallery, it does not become degraded (the bad copy) or hypertrophied (the manic running in place of the simulacrum, forever the same, forever removed from the space of human action). From version to version, event to repetition of event, we meander, going *somewhere*. Their genre is not documentary, but something more like performance. They deal with walks so persistently perhaps because a walk is a place where we can lose ourselves in the course of getting somewhere.⁷ Never entirely dissolute, never perfectly repeatable, neither trace nor drawing entirely, walks may register the rhythms and possibilities of selfhood in a particular period because they put bodies in motion, and movement forces a body to encounter itself in moments where a particular place and a particular time seem to crowd one other, producing a suspended present tense that forgets itself in order to move forward while being forced to persistently re-member itself at the same time. The present tense is a period's own genre of suspension.⁸

Here is what Hamilton and Southern's *Distance Made Good: Field Study* (Dunlop



Art Gallery, Sherwood Village Branch Library, Regina, Canada, 2003) presents: a de-rigidified white grid strung in the corner of the room, drooping from wall to floor, made of the kind of heavy strapping used in shipping. Laid over which: a pattern of red mason's line and a pattern of yellow mason's line, each line candent against the more blandly informational surveying tools which

⁶ Name an art that isn't technologically-mediated; but people are more suspicious of some technologies than others.

⁷ For more on "spacing out," see: Taussig, Michael, "Spacing Out," in *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993).

⁸ Robert Walser, Walter Benjamin, and Eugene Atget were all interested in walks and walking, and each is, in his own way, closely associated with his own period, his own present tense—even thought to be definitive of it.

surround the lines. The red line corresponds to the walk taken by Jen Hamilton in the Sherwood Forest Country Club (Saskatchewan, Canada); the yellow line to the walk taken by Jen Southern in Sherwood Forest (Nottingham, UK). The yellow line is punctuated by yellow flags; the red by red flags. The flags mark specific sites along the route. Small metal rings along each line measure out an even tempo of distances. Underneath the red and the yellow lines is a large map, displaying a dataset of latitude and longitude coordinates. The red and yellow lines appear as routes, as records of walks, when laid over the coordinate space of the map. Except that both the lines and the limp grid far exceed the surface area of the map, as if to suggest that the map cannot represent the routes in full, or that the routes walk right off the map. All of the figured relations—the relation of the de-rigidified grid to normal grids, of the yellow and red lines to the map, of the red line to the yellow line, and of the walks to this entire system of forms—suggest something like excess, but maybe something more like non-coincidence, by which I mean, a system of coincidences (of walk to the line of a walk; of one form of grid to another; of one line to another) which do not exhaust one another in the way that a photograph is often said to exhaust its subject, or a map its territory.

The grid was made art historically famous by Rosalind Krauss' account of it as the "emblem" and the declaration of "the modernity of modern art."⁹ The ambition of this modernity, according to Krauss, was to wall modernist visual arts off from realistic or mimetic spaces of representation, to barricade the past, to produce for modern art an autonomous "world apart."¹⁰ When seen against this background, Hamilton and Southern's grid—porous, unsystematic, exhausted—is less a figure for ambition (to map, to divide, to become avant-garde in its production of an always out of reach outside) than it is a figure for leakage, for porosity. If we feel that we catch a glimpse of Hamilton and Southern's walks through this system of lines, the flicker of a body moving through the woods or between the flags of a golf course, it is not through the agency of representation but the inability of a system ever to complete its project. The surveying tools appropriated here are part of a system (mapping, surveying, claiming land) that orders bodies, property, and movement itself. But never perfectly. Consequently, the exhausted grid produces simultaneities—the past leaking into the present, one space leaking into another—but mis-timed ones, existing together but not in unity.

The modernist grid is the fantasy that ordered space—the production of all spaces as spaces apart—would also order time. And that order in these realms would produce order in the realm of knowledge. Here in Chicago, a city laid out along an almost perfect grid, it is always possible to know one's location. But look up at any time and you can see to the horizon. This is an effect of the grid, but isn't knowledge so much as the awareness that knowledge is forever receding (the horizon isn't a place but a movement).

⁹ Krauss, Rosalind E., "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10

Satellites move not along a grid but within orbits, and orbits are always decaying. Satellites are constantly moving in and out of orbit, constantly being replaced—the system they comprise must be renewed constantly. The Global Positioning System was developed by the United States Department of Defense. It launched its first experimental satellite in 1978 (at which time the system was called NAVSTAR GPS or Navigation Signal Timing and Ranging GPS), but the technology is part of a longer history of ground-based navigation that dates back to the 1940's and World War II. Today, the U.S. military's 50th Space Wing manages the system (their motto: "Master of Space"). In 1996, U.S. President Bill Clinton made GPS a public resource, available for civilian use. This is why we can buy off-the-shelf GPS receivers today, devices made to tap into this now public resource (public, if you've got the money). The system consists of twenty-four satellites in six circular orbits. Each satellite contains a computer, an atomic clock, and a radio. The on-board computer calculates position, velocity and time by communicating, via radio signal, with four satellites simultaneously.¹¹ Consumer-grade receivers, like the kind Hamilton and Southern use in their work, give a positional reading accurate to within six meters. The twenty-four satellites are always there, always orbiting. Their orbits are managed so that, at any time, at any spot on the planet, six satellites will be "visible" or available to give a reading. With or without a device, therefore, we walk constantly inside the signals being sent to and from space, and which promise to give a sense of location, if not presence. This is why Hamilton and Southern's work invokes the readymade. They work with a system that is available as a public resource. Although like all public resources in the contemporary United States, and increasingly in the United Kingdom, it is a public subsumed within a commercial space. One must first buy a GPS receiver—not to exist in this public (we all exist in it already), but to derive some kind of knowledge from it.

GPS satellites are the "re-" that orbits experience. They make every walk into a record of a walk. This is true both in reality and *in potentia*, which is to say, it is true whether or not we own a GPS receiver. We could call our time, then, the *satellite present*. Here in the satellite present, everything orbits something else, all walks are ghosted by drawings that barely fail to be tracings, all hearing is overhearing, and all orbits decay. "Decay" is a satellite's vocabulary for leakage, for a system that is not systemic.

Walks and stories transmitted through the satellite present are experienced as the *almost overheard*. We know the conversations are happening. Every unsearched result from every Google search (the three million results we never click), every forum we don't join, every spam we don't open, every ordinary photograph that we ignore or take pleasure in scorning tells us that information is circulating, conversations are happening, people are documenting meals and walks, uploading stories and photographs. It's all there. We can almost overhear

¹¹ "Global Positioning System Overview," Peter H. Dana
http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gcraft/notes/gps/gps_f.html, last accessed 18.09.06;
<http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/faq/gpsfaq.htm>, last accessed 29.11.06.

it—even when we don't want to. If we feel shut out or walled off from something when standing in front of Hamilton and Southern's quiet lines, their simple stitches in fabric, isn't this feeling the point at which we become most keenly aware of the elsewhere which orbits all of their work? Ordinary life is a process of being caught within multiple elsewheres, arrhythmic meanwhiles. This is what it feels like to live in the satellite present. In this airport waiting lounge, a man on the television voices the aspiration to "create memories with my family."

The quality of attention we give to Hamilton and Southern's work, as with our own walks, our own ordinary repetitions, depends very much on how careful we are when we talk about versions, copies, reiterations, reenactments, etc.—because the landscape of mediation in the satellite present is intensified, folded over on itself again and yet again. Because, simply, there are so many versions, so many types and temporalities, so many different feelings about different versions (some, like official histories, lag far behind the events they record; some, like the American government's "reports" on terrorist activities or weapons of mass destruction, seem to walk out in front of reality itself). As a consequence, there are many different kinds of encounter one can have with the versioned image. Compare the map of a city you've never visited to the map of a city you know well. This forces us to think not only about knowledge and what is knowable (does the copy produce inferior knowledge, the world made less knowable?), but about the affect of ordinary life in the satellite present. Remediated experience (the walk versioned as a route and stitched into canvas) doesn't blunt affect, it re-routes it, provides a more convoluted landscape for its appearance and sensation. And so the work of the artist (or critic) who wants to track such things becomes harder, a task less amenable to systems and procedures.¹² One of the passions of Hamilton and Southern's work over the past five years has been to track these re-routings of feeling.¹³ Neither pessimistic nor optimistic, their work instead orients itself to the task of learning what might be accomplished in those bent circuits, those exhausted grids—what might be felt there.¹⁴

¹² Lyotard calls the experience of time in remediating networks a kind of vertigo. Cited in Quick, Andrew, "Time and the Event," *Cultural Values* 2, no. 2 & 3 (1998).

¹³ Feeling is affect brought into awareness, into language. See: Shouse, Eric, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *M/C Journal* 8, no. 6 (2005).

¹⁴ Massumi amplifies this call for experimentation over moralism, highlighting the way that moralism, as a response to the emergence of new technology, belies the same uncertain relation to the future that moralists decry as the threat of new technologies. Do the moralists know that, by halting emergence, things will get better? And if so, how do they know? "This experimentally open, affirmative posture can be considered a socially responsible approach to the problem of human evolution only if the critical thinker can answer an unhedged 'yes' to this counterquestion: *If all of this* [bio-technological evolution, cloning, gene sequencing, etc.] *doesn't happen, will there be an end to impoverishment and inequality and will the earth not be trashed?* Until that affirmation is forthcoming, there is no argument, only a clash of desires. Two desires implicating divergent modes of existence: affirmed ex-human intensity and all-too-human moralism." Massumi, Brian, "The Evolutionary Alchemy of Reason: Stelarc," in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University

“The satellite present” is a phrase that thinks figuratively about satellites, using the specific kind of network that a GPS device sits within (bouncing radio signals from earth to satellite and back to sender) as a figure for periodicity, for what it feels like to live now. But it also thinks quite literally about the various ways that events and experiences and memories are folded back on themselves (as déjà vu, regret, haunting...); the ways that our experiences of the present are orbited by other presents;¹⁵ the ways that our experiences of being in the moment are ghosted by other versions of ourselves, some delayed (e.g. love¹⁶), some far out ahead of us (e.g. anxiety¹⁷). But no matter how omnipresent this phantom “re-”, signaled by the near unavailability of words like “remediate,” “reiterate,” “repeat,” “retrace,” it does not produce a world in which nothing new happens. It does not mean that there are no surprises.¹⁸

This is how David Foster Wallace, in a short story called “Think,” describes a moment in the middle of a scene of seduction, betrayal and hopeless redemption: “The languid half-turn and push of the door are tumid with some kind of significance; he realizes she’s replaying a scene from some movie she loves. In his imagination’s tableau his wife’s hand is on his small son’s shoulder in an almost fatherly way.”¹⁹ But the mode of significance here, replayed from “some movie” the woman loves, does not evacuate the scene’s intensity. It torques it, ratchets it up and through other sites and other times, some movie or romance novel or other. The woman *loves* the film that she replays in the here-and-now of seduction, loves it like her own life. The recognition of this fact contributes intensely to the man’s anguish.

Press, 2002), p. 132.

¹⁵ Lefebvre, Henri, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹⁶ Berlant, Lauren, “Love, A Queer Feeling,” in *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis*, edited by Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Salecl, Renata, *On Anxiety* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁸ For three different perspectives on the way that difference, or newness is produced out of repetition see: Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition* Translated by Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994); Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Stiegler, Bernard, “The Time of Cinema: On the ‘New World’ and ‘Cultural Exception’,” *Tekhnema: Journal of Philosophy and Technology* 4 (1988), pp. 62-118. For an account of Deleuze’s conception of philosophy as a set of practices which release a new event within a concept, thereby replaying that concept and changing it, see Patton, Paul, “The World Seen from Within: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Events,” *Theory and Event* 1, no. 1 (1997).

¹⁹ Wallace, David Foster, “Think,” in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (New York, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999). pp. 72-3.

In *Satellite Bureau* (Regina, Saskatchewan, 2005; Cardigan, UK 2005), Hamilton and Southern invited residents of Regina to go for walks while carrying a GPS device. Simple enough. The drawings from all of the walks taken over the life of the project were materialised as thread and pinned to a wall of the studio space that Hamilton and Southern occupied as a base of operations during the project. On the wall, ascetic versions of walks were made to coincide, although



imperfectly, to produce what they call a "map of the city" (although the walks never cease to exist singularly). The work of *Satellite Bureau* was to collate these walks. A mapping bureau, then. A tracking bureau. Also a record bureau. The word "bureau" refers to an office of public administration.²⁰ When a bureau disseminates information, they distribute it to a pre-defined public (citizens, or walkers, or residents of Regina or Cardigan), and also create a public for that

information, one that is both addressed and represented by that information. Like distance made good, this public is both a drawing and a tracing. The satellite bureau creates conditions under which its public (walkers and their watchers) becomes intelligible to itself, perhaps in a new way, perhaps as a fantasy. In either case, this is an intelligibility routed through satellites, bounced from here to there, then returned to us. The satellite bureau returns us to ourselves, changed. We return in the time of the satellite present.

In ordinary life, some of us have access to partial views of this present while some of us do not, although all of us live in it (right now, using my neighbor's wireless network, I can go to Google Earth and pull down a satellite photo, only a few months old, of the building in which I now sit, typing these words). But in the satellite present, presence is not only registered by vision; we need other senses. Those of us with partial views are not necessarily better off; we simply have some things to look at, satellite photos and websites and maybe a map. Hamilton and Southern overlay our ordinary existence in the satellite present with forms of participation in it, engaging our feelings, our bodies—not just our vision or our knowledge, both of which operate so contentedly at a distance.

One thing that has changed over time in Hamilton and Southern's work, from *Distance Made Good* (2002) to their newest work, *Running Stitch* (2006), is time, or to be precise, timing. In their early works, a walk and the version of a walk that

²⁰ Oxford English Dictionary online, accessed 01.10.06 "2. An office, esp. for the transaction of public business; a department of public administration. spec. In modern use, an office or business with a specified function; an agency for the co-ordination of related activities, the distribution of information, etc."

came to rest in the gallery were separated in time—lagged.²¹ Visitors took a walk, their GPS device recorded their route, and this route was transcribed, eventually, into the gallery. “Eventually” is no timing in particular; it is a transmission that is delayed, unpredictably. This means that the walkers were first participants and then members of the gallery audience, beholders: versions of themselves occurring in sequence. They could attend the opening like anyone else, and experience their own walk aesthetically, as a re-presentation. Walker-participants took their place in the public for the work, but were at the same time irrevocably set apart by the fact and memory of their participation—like the actor-director after a day of shooting, returning to the editing studio to look at rushes. Maybe the walk, in this context, in this timing, felt like a trial run, an audition, a deposit for future use.

What feels like the intractable difference between the walk and the walk-as-line transcribed into the gallery—the line's muteness to the walk's volubility, the line's impersonality to the walk's familiar personality—makes it seem as though this difference has always been a problem for Hamilton and Southern's work, some site of resistance within itself, e.g., how to usher all that human detail, those personal geographies into the work? We might, then, have expected them to make more elaborate maps, affixing stories, stills, video, amassing content through detail, interrogating the line, forcing it to speak. In *Running Stitch*, their



solution, instead, was to embed their work deeper in the satellite present, which does not rely on better representations, but rather on more labyrinthine routings, more distance and the ways we find to fill and to feel those distances. Here, Hamilton and Southern begin to exploit a key feature of the satellite present: simultaneity, or liveness, or what some people idealistically call “real-time.” Simultaneity chases lag underground, and in catching up to ourselves, we seem

to have caught up with the people around us, whether we call those people nation, community, or public (think of a live television broadcast). Liveness produces the feeling of being caught up in a public, a popular movement, an upwelling of feeling.²² In *Running Stitch*, we watch the line being drawn as the walk is happening, and we watch the artists in the gallery trace that line, rendering it as a sequence of stitches, as a running stitch. To witness the making

²¹ I learned about the importance of lag to our experience of contemporary life, about the ways that we are always having to catch up to ourselves, from Lauren Berlant. See, for instance, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Series Q (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

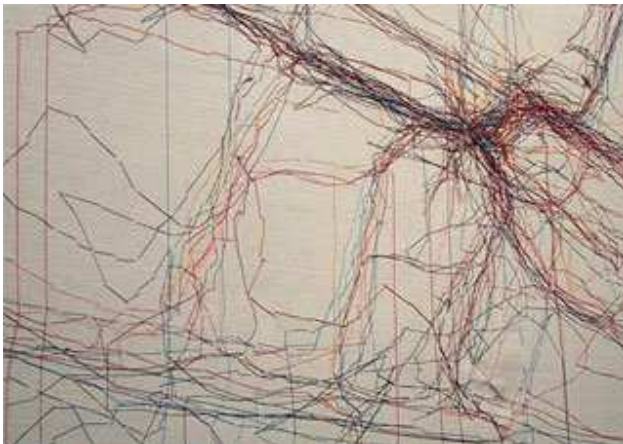
²² Berlant, *The Queen of America*.

of the line gives the feeling of being witness to a live event, late-breaking news, a happening.



The sewn line, the line being sewn, is a physical labor. It takes time, dexterity; it offers up various resistances (to the hands, to sight, to precision, to stamina). Stitching under these gently pressured conditions, while the walk is happening, trying to keep pace with it, evokes the work involved in the production of liveness, its achievement. The stitched line only barely keeps pace with the walked line, which is digitally projected live

onto the canvas in the gallery, and is constantly updated, as the walk is happening. In fact, the running stitch lags slightly behind, so that when the walker returns to the gallery, she often sees her own line being completed. To draw the



line in pen or pencil while it was being walked, or to leave it as a projection, would take no time at all, would make the trace subordinate to the walk, would indulge us in the fantasy of believing that what we see in the gallery is merely a representation, a second-best version of an event that really happens elsewhere, in some privileged site of experience, in the “real” world, “real” life, in some simpler place.

Running Stitch simulates liveness by erasing the lag between a walk and that walk's embodiment in the gallery. Hamilton and Southern's research into mobile phones and GPS (*Landlines: Dynamic Multi-User GPS Drawing Tool for Participatory Exhibitions*, in collaboration with Onteca Ltd., 2004) taught them how to plug a mobile phone and a local computer network into the existing satellite network, and now, when a participant walks—*while* a participant walks—that walk, in a digitally projected version of itself, arrives in the gallery. Hamilton and Southern sit in the gallery, receive the walk, and re-play it as a stitched line on a canvas that is twenty-five metres square, five metres on a side, suspended from the gallery ceiling. For four weeks, every walk will be stitched into the same canvas, where five metres equals two miles, where up equals north, and where every new line both remembers and forgets the city outside the gallery.

Here, the satellite present feels live: the artists are working; the participants are walking. We in the gallery are witnesses, but also past and future walkers. With the simultaneously drawn line, where a record is inscribed *while* a walk is taken, we in the gallery might not know what banalities, impediments, surprises, or joys a walk produces, but we feel closer to feeling that something is going on out there. The line being drawn digitally is also being traced—then it is stitched: these ongoing processes remind us of a simultaneous presence (there is a body out there, right now). We might have seen someone leave the gallery carrying the GPS receiver and mobile phone that one checks out from gallery staff. We might know their face. They might be a friend (or become one). The simultaneity of the process generates a feeling or cluster of feelings: the excitement of its production, the boredom of its stasis or slow motion, the bathos of its halting or breaking down.

But if liveness erases lag here, we might think of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* as a model (1953). Erasure is a fundamentally historical gesture. Because it can never be completed, it is destined to remember. The title of Rauschenberg's drawing signals the perpetual failure of the gesture to complete itself, or the success of the gesture in perpetuating itself—it never becomes simply "Erased," never a *fait accompli*. In Hamilton and Southern's work, running stitches erase walks, and the distances that come between walks and their versions, but they do so continuously, forcing these distances, these differences perpetually back into our awareness by the very mechanism that



erases them. This is why the satellite present can never finally foreclose experience, can never perfectly erase memories or subjugated knowledge or minor events or the ordinary and animating details of a walk. To almost overhear is never quite not hearing. If satellites steal our image to place it elsewhere (in someone else's hands, a spy or a capitalist), they also provide us with another way to encounter our own image.²³

Or someone else's. (Beneath the canvas, at its extreme right bottom corner, is a small television playing a video of

²³ In a similar spirit, a line of thinkers from the middle of the 20th century to the opening years of the 21st have produced accounts of technology which are radically ambivalent. Never merely pessimistic, never merely optimistic, they see the conditions of continued oppression laminated tightly to the conditions for change. I'm thinking here of Benjamin and reproduction; Foucault and power; Bernard Stiegler and the time of cinema; Agamben and the coming community [Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community* Translated by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN.: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993).]

Hamilton and Southern power kiting on an empty beach. The hand held video camera holds them, one at a time, in close focus as they are pulled around by an enormous kite that almost always flies just above and outside the frame. Looking up to track the kite, to predict where they will be pulled next, they seem to be looking up at the canvas above the television, up at the running stitch. So is this event too (like the event on the canvas) happening live, somewhere else, a nearby beach? We might be wondering this very thing at the very moment that Hamilton or Southern pass behind us in the gallery, to take up or leave their post behind the canvas, where they stitch the lines being walked. What, then, would be the temporality of this encounter? To say it occurs in the satellite present characterises the nature of the surprise, but not its feeling.)

Some will want to call this movement in the work, from lag to simultaneity (and even to call the work itself) technological, e.g. New Media Art. They will want to say that walking and tracing have become simultaneous because the technology now allows it. But that seems to explain both too little and too much. What isn't technologised in the satellite present? GPS is designed so that every point on the planet, every single place to stand, is exposed via a direct line of sight to at least six satellites, and so is exposed to the knowability of location, of coordination. And yet, what part of Hamilton and Southern's work is satisfied with, is quieted by a technological explanation? All of their work drives home the point that technology is no longer an explanation; never a simple cause. And so neither is it exactly an artistic medium. In any case, technology (GPS receivers, satellites, mobile phones) and something we might, if we're thinking in polarities, call the human (memories, walks, personal geographies) aren't at war in their work; they are mutually suspended in the satellite present. And this mutual belonging undoes each in its turn, undoes each in its isolation. Perhaps our bodies know the way that technologies and humans belong to each other because they, because we, have long been suspended in this version of the present tense, this tense present.²⁴ But our sentences lag behind this mute understanding.²⁵ And so to call the movement of Hamilton and Southern's work a progression (toward mastery of art or technology, toward simultaneity as an achievement) is to flatter our knowledge of how we move within and apprehend history, to pretend that our sentences have caught up when every phone call, every photograph, every walk tells us that they have not. But if every walk is a sentence that begins "I have to report that one fine morning...", then every walk is a chance to encounter ourselves, to become intelligible to ourselves in thought or in feeling, if only for a moment, in the syncopated and tricky time of the satellite present. Hamilton and Southern invite us out on walks, but what they are really offering is neither the

²⁴ Wallace, David Foster, "Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars Over Usage," *Harper's Magazine*. April (2001).

²⁵ Deleuze calls this lagged feature of experience "description." See Patton "The World Seen from Within: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Events." Lyotard calls it "the phrase." Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* Translated by Abbeele, Georges Van Den (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). For more on body knowledge, or what our bodies know, see Probyn, Elspeth, "Everyday Shame," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (2004): 328-349.

walk itself nor the chance to view the walk rendered as line, but the patience and temerity to live between the versions of ourselves that we already are.

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