

Hilary Ramsden & Clare Qualmann

Art and food have a long history of intersections; from Alison Knowles 'Make a Salad' Fluxus score (1962) to Gordon Matta Clark's 'Food' (1972), Rikrit Tirivaniya's 'Pad Thai' (1992) to Jorge and Lucy Orta's 'Hortirecycling' (1997), Ceri Buck's 'Invisible Food' (2008), to Company Drink's 'Going Picking' (2014). Food connects people; sharing in its gathering, production and eating enables the building of new knowledge and new understandings of place. These works also have in common the way in which they engage with people – beyond the role of audience – as participants who are central to the creation and realisation of the work; human relations and their social context (Bourriaud, 1998).

In this paper we give some background to the ongoing artwork 'Chip Walk' that operates through walking for, and with, food. We begin with the history of the work and chart its development from roots in East London where Clare is based, to a global spread, with a focus on Lesbos, Greece, where Hilary spends time. In each of these locations we consider what the Chip Walk does; how it connects with people, politics and place in a site-specific and political-timing-specific way. We conclude with a discussion around the potentials of walking art to connect people, place and politics as activism.

The Chip Walk is an artwork that has developed over a number of years. It began in 2005, when, as part of a wider project entitled 'walkwalkwalk an archaeology of the familiar and forgotten' the artists Gail Burton, Serena Korda and myself, Clare Qualmann, found a chip fork. This was one of a number of found objects that formed the 'archaeology of the familiar and forgotten' of our subtitle. These things were gathered from the streets of Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Shoreditch – the area of East London where we were living and working. The objects played a core role in our on-foot exploration of a part of the

city that we felt was familiar – exploring and re-exploring to see afresh what we had thought that we knew.

In 2007 this one particular find, the chip fork, became the basis for a new branch of the artwork – an exploration of the postcode district of E8, just to the north of our core territory. We were invited by Transition Gallery, who had just moved to E8, to create a walk for their exhibition 'E8: The Heart of Hackney'. Although E8 bounded one side of our existing walk area, none of us knew the district well – the key point that we could think of was the chip shop on Broadway Market, and another on Kingsland Road.

From the late nineteenth century, fish and chips became a popular dish in the UK – with numerous shops serving the fried combination. Widely understood as a 'national' dish, fish and chips still hold an important place as a ubiquitous British foodstuff – available in pretty much every community that is sizeable enough to sustain a fast food business. Although the fish element of the food – usually taken away to eat in a paper wrapper – is now relatively expensive, a bag, or 'poke', of chips is still a very cheap, quick and easily available food stuff.

Our exploration of E8 mapped every chip shop. We specified that these should be 'traditional' chip shops, those making thick cut chips from potatoes – rather than the 'chicken shop style' skinny chip or French fry, often made from reconstituted potato (for example those served in Burger King or McDonalds). We mapped them by walking, starting out at a known chip shop and buying a bag of chips, then walking and eating until we found another, or until the chips ran out. Over a number of weeks we used this method to locate every chip shop in the area, walking and eating and walking. We created a chip shop map, and two custom chip paper wrappers – one with chip stories, and one with chip facts – and we persuaded the chip shops to wrap their chips in these for the duration of the month-long exhibition at Transition.

As we walked and ate and mapped the chip shops – talking to the owners and the people who worked in them along the way – we began to consider the shifting food map of the area as an indicator of the gentrification that was then in its early stages. One chip shop on our route closed down during the period between the mapping and the public tour that we led. As a London borough Hackney in 2005 was experiencing rapid change, with the introduction of new transport routes opening up previously difficult to reach areas, and dramatic improvements in the state education system. The resulting gentrification was pushing out low-

rent businesses, like chip shops, as craft brewers, sourdough bakers, vegan cafes and cocktail bars began to appear.

The Chip Shop Tour of E8 took a group of around 30 people on a walk, stopping at each chip shop to buy and eat chips. The tour involved participants in discussions about food, what we want to eat, where and when. We talked (informally and conversationally) about our memories of food - our favourite regional variations in chip shops - and the chips of our childhoods. We discussed the combinations of chips with other national cuisines - for example Chinese restaurants like Ming Hai and The Golden Star on our route that serve Chinese dishes alongside fish and chips. What quickly became apparent is that chips are a lens through which to explore a place - a lens that brings into focus food cultures, changing demographics, regeneration, and the interconnecting threads that spread out from those factors.

In 2014, when developing the content for the book *Ways to Wander* (Qualmann and Hind, 2015), I (Clare) revisited the chip shop walk, restructuring the concept as an instruction for anyone to use. It instigated a revisiting of the project through multiple locations, using the bag of chips as a tool to explore the places that walkers were in - and it was this translation that has led to my collaboration with Hilary.

Hilary's walking and theatrical practice of clowning both involve interruptions - of assumptions and expectations, of logic and habit, of seriousness and play and of everyday movement and all these elements are linked. For her the Chip Walk is a further interruption in an intentional everyday kind of walk and one that brings together people around a common purpose, buying and eating food; and noticing and perhaps discussing in some depth the surrounding environment might happen almost as an aside, in a deceptively easy and simple way. In this way the chips might be considered almost a playful misdirection, in magician's terms, where other issues emerge almost by chance, through incidental conversations, imaginings, local knowledge, the re-surfacing of memories and the periodic attention to surroundings as the Chip Walk moves on.

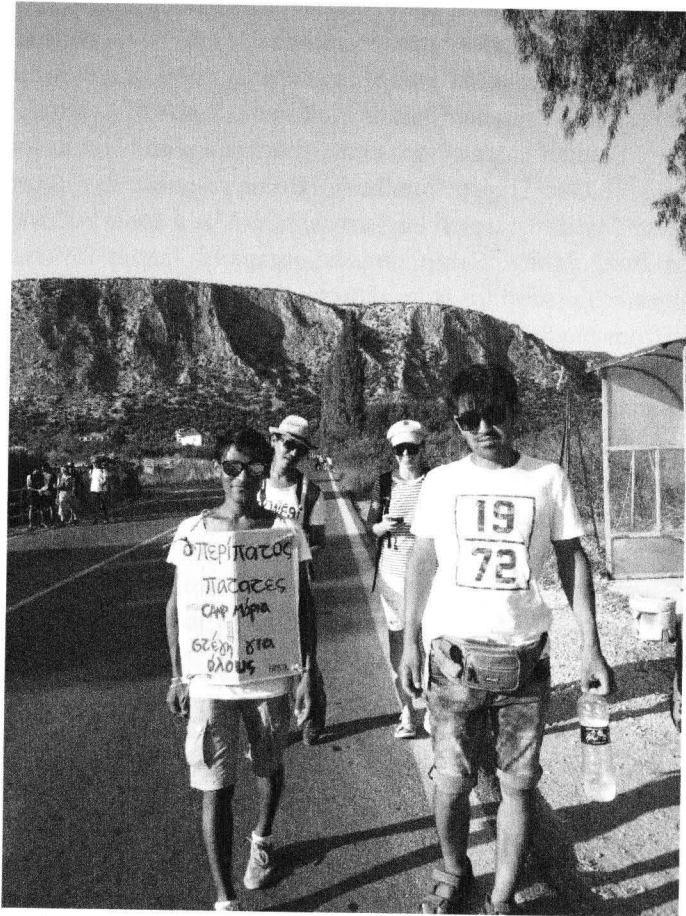
A bag of chips happens to be one of my (Hilary's) favourite foods: my mother used to make fantastic chips and I make sure I get to know the best (a personal opinion, of course) chip shops wherever I live. The story of my connection to Lesvos is too long to go into here but it is enough to say that on Lesvos and in the village of Skala Eresos, almost every restaurant makes their own homemade chips. This was a most delicious revelation to me and one of many reasons when early in January 2018 when Blake Morris asked

for people to accompany him during his year of working and walking through the artworks in the book *Ways to Wander*, I naturally chose the Chip Walk; he happened to be walking it on my birthday, in August, and I would be on Lesvos - what better way to celebrate than to go from restaurant to restaurant in Skala Eresos eating chips.

During that spring and summer questions to do with resilience and sustainability also started to emerge as I worked with Cookie Arnone, an artist-activist who was coordinating different kinds of projects, from building a women's centre to organising paper and paint for arts workshops at One Happy Family (OHF), a resource day centre for refugees in Mytilini (capital of Lesvos). OHF is a long but walkable distance from Moria Camp and is organised largely by refugees themselves with support from European NGOs. Resources include support from medical doctors and lawyers as well as a café, shop, play area, and large space with tables for eating a free lunch made by the refugees themselves, room for sitting and talking, sockets for charging mobile phones, a school room, workshop space and a developing garden area where food for the kitchen is grown. All these have been organised and built from scratch by refugees and volunteers. The theatre work and puppetry I was making with adults and children at OHF was a tiny part of this network of creating sustainable activities and projects that would build resilience in an arguably hostile and inhospitable situation. Resilience in a sense of creating the "capacity to retain a degree of integrity, self organization and self awareness by engaging a process of finding value in the constant flux of everyday life." (Douglas, Fremantle, Delday: 2004). Situations where people can regain or find this resilience become crucial in these life and death circumstances and creating and participating in artworks offer such opportunities. Felski suggests we might begin to do this by "addressing the practical and experiential logic of everyday modes of orientation rather than seeking to transform or transcend them" (2002: 617). Thus a familiar walk with additional elements took root as an idea.

So what, then, was my birthday Chip Walk with Blake? It felt frivolous and strangely irresponsible: I became increasingly uncomfortable with the idea that I would be walking small distances between eating places in Skala Eresos, getting food easily, celebrating with friends whilst not that far away in Mytilini people would be walking eight kilometres from the Moria refugee camp to the not-for-profit taverna, Home for All, for a free evening meal. It might be the only meal of the day for them in a camp

filled to more than four times its capacity and where a two-hour wait for sub-standard and sometimes inedible food was the norm. Moreover, it is still the norm that many people all over the world walk miles to get food and water each day.



Chip walkers with sign 'Chip Walk from Moria Camp to Taverna Home for All', August 2018, photo: Hilary Ramsden

To highlight this fact and to continue to raise awareness of the desperate situation for refugees in Moria camp, I decided I had to walk a different kind of Chip Walk. I collaborated with Cookie to organise a Lesvos Chip Walk to start at Moria camp and end with a free meal at Home for All. There was a chip van just outside the gates at Moria camp where I could buy us chips at the start of the walk then there would be food at the end

of the eight kilometres at Home for All. We advertised the walk and asked people to join us; it would be hot and dry, but we received enthusiastic responses and started out with 62 walkers, refugees, asylum seekers and NGO workers and volunteers from all over the world: from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Tibet, Greece, UK, France, The Republic of Congo, the Netherlands, Germany, many of whom had crossed the sea in tiny plastic rafts to Lesvos from Turkey.

People were so enthusiastic to start the walk that they left before the chips were cooked. Three of us waited to get four large portions of chips, more as a token to symbolise the essence of the walk than anything else, because even when we caught up with everyone people did not attack the chips with the gusto that I have come to expect from UK chip eaters. By contrast, the chip brooches I had made from cutting up yellow car sponges were much more enthusiastically received and worn. These were my attempt to document and add a further aesthetic aspect to the walk, where "Metaphor can shine light on particular aspects of an issue, make unexpected depth visible, or bring into focus what is yet unclear or previously unexplored" (Korza, Assaf & Bacon, 2003:7). For it was important to me that the walk was still an artwork as well as an activist intervention and making sponge chips was just as important a part of the process as buying the hot chips from the van outside the camp gates.

The walk gave each of us a chance to walk and talk with different people, at different paces and at different levels of engagement. Some people were already friends, some worked together, had become friends in the camp or had crossed the sea together. All wanted to engage in conversations and discussions – many about family, about their situation in the camp, about their desires and dreams for the future – where they wanted to be and what they wanted to be doing: not living in the camp and not being sent back to where they had fled from. We were creating what Grant Kester (2004: 3) calls dialogic art where we take "the traditional art materials of marble, canvas or pigment" and replace them with "socio-political relationships."

Along the way we talked, introducing ourselves to each other, hopefully creating what Kester (2004: 6) suggests is "an open space where individuals can break free from pre-existing roles and obligations, reacting and interacting in new and unforeseeable ways."

We continue to conduct further iterations of this convivial and participatory artwork: In July 2019 there was a simultaneous Chip Walk in East London and in Prespes, Greece as part of the 'Walking Encounters

/ Walking Bodies / Walking Practices' conference. For 'Walking's New Movements' conference in Plymouth 2019 we conducted a shorter chip walk sampling chips around the Barbican area of the city, having discussions with chip shop workers and taking note of the regeneration of buildings and structures that has resulted in a particular mix of architectural transformations of the area. The chip walks forefront food as a lens through which to connect walking, urban regeneration, conviviality, migration and research methodologies for social change.



'Comparing chips in Plymouth', November 2019, photo: Clare Qualmann

These subsequent Chip Walks and the recounting of the Lesvos Chip Walk have enabled me (Hilary) to raise money (by selling sponge chips for €1 each) which I have been able to give to Home for All, contributing to the purchase of a pizza oven which now provides more free dinners for more refugees.

What further Chip Walks on Lesvos point to is the creation of a longer, continued story – not only of personal stories from the people in the camps but the creation of dialogue with others – in other places on Lesvos, beyond, to mainland Greece, to other countries and peoples in Europe where there is the potential to raise awareness and money, as well as to fight for justice through the legal systems for people seeking asylum and fleeing oppression.

“The challenge is to facilitate movement from ‘my personal story’ to a deeper understanding of collective implications, to a capacity for communication in a diverse public realm, to *civic dialogue*. From expressing to *being heard*, and in hearing in return. From sharing to *contributing*.” (Americans for the Arts, 2003: 9)

Those of us who are lucky enough to be able to walk to the local chip shop to get food with money that we are privileged to earn easily must be able and willing to contribute time, money and energy to fight bureaucracy, to resist complacency and to go beyond our fear of the other in order to assist in making it easier for people to flee oppression and injustice and to live with respect and hope.

In this way the value of walking and talking (and in this case, eating) is a “kind of orchestration of voices, interests and exchanges that can illuminate issues, advance understanding and have a lasting, cumulative impact over time.”(ibid: 10)

In London the rewalking of the chip shop tour of E8 revealed many shifts and changes in the food landscape of the East End. The first shop on the route – Broadway Fish Bar had a sign in the window saying closed for refurbishment – but the date given for reopening was April 2019, and we were walking in July. The Star Fish bar on Wilton Way has become Pidgin – voted the UK’s best restaurant in 2017. Ming Hai, the Chinese restaurant and chip shop was still intact, though closed for the afternoon. The Golden Star has been turned into residential space, the glass shop front removed and built over. Faulknors, the long standing ‘posh chippy’ on Kingsland road looked like it was closed in the gap between lunch and dinner but on closer inspection the dusty counter and littered floor suggest that the closure might be longer term. Slightly brighter news is that despite the closures of all but one of the shops on the 2007 route Sutton and Sons – a new ‘posh chippy’ has opened on Graham Rd – catering to new demands for vegan food options alongside the more traditional offer of cod and chips – and upscale menu items like lobster as well.

In London the gentrification that was in its infancy in 2007 is now full blown. Hackney house prices have risen by a staggering 568% in the last twenty years. Alongside this influx of wealth is a huge disparity in income, and many neighbourhoods within the borough score highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Food is not at the vanguard of this wave of change, but it:

offers a particularly visceral entry point into the politics and processes of gentrification. It is not just that humans must eat to survive. Food is an economic anchor for community development. Food is also culture. Food is therefore a proxy for social divisions and social cohesion. (Sbicca, 2018: 3)

The Chip Walk enables us to interrogate the commonalities of circumstances (people gathering together for simple, everyday activities of walking, eating and talking) and of disparities that exist in these worlds apart - between incomes, accessibility to work and housing, in addition to issues of gentrification, sustainable building and urban planning. The two main contexts that we have practised this work in; Lesvos and Hackney, are worlds apart, yet the action of walking and eating and talking, following a score for an artwork, creates in each location a temporary community with 'rich opportunities to engage people in the examination of issues of societal concern.' (Romney, 2005: 3).

There is also the element of repetition, the reiteration of previous walks, that also enables us as walk artists to consider the similarities and differences between walks. Repetition not being a means to subordinate individuality or uniqueness but rather a way of making sense of patterns of culture (Felski, 2002). Additionally, it enables us to look askance at our processes and methods, refining, re-interrogating our practices, in exchange with others.

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Noble & King, Walking with Correspondence

Simon King and Corinne Noble



Medusa, Camberwell Correspondence

THE INTRODUCTION

I am a writer and researcher who since 2017, alongside my own practice, has worked collaboratively (as 'Noble & King') with the artist Corinne Noble.¹ The following is an account of how we incorporate literal and

¹Unless otherwise indicated as the voice of Corinne Noble or the comments of participant walkers (both italicised), in what follows the 'I' refers to me and the 'we' / 'our' refers to Noble & King.