# Delirium ambulatorium: city walks as conceptual mapping: from Hélio Oiticica to Rasheed Araeen and Lee Wen.

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# *Delirium ambulatorium* – city walks as conceptual mapping: From Hélio Oiticica to Rasheed Araeen and Lee Wen

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> I love that city and it is the only place in the world that interests me … This trip and now the prospect of coming back have cheered me up so much that it seems I'm alive again … I felt such an 'ambulatory delirium' that I couldn't stop walking day and night around the city.
>
> Hélio Oiticica (October 1970)[1]

Writing during a brief stay in New York in October 1970, Brazil-born artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–80) first used the term 'ambulatory delirium' to describe his feelings of intense elation when walking through the city. The year marked a number of successes for the young artist. Having departed from Brazil in 1968, Oiticica held his first solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1969, followed by an invitation to participate in the influential exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970. Concurrently, he was awarded a prestigious Guggenheim Foundation fellowship to develop further work between 1971 and 1973. 'Ambulatory delirium' thus not only captured the artist's immense joy and sense of personal success, it also conveyed one of the central premises of his artistic practice since his time in Brazil: namely, how the simple act of wandering served as a means for the city's space to be imprinted upon, and conceptually 'charted' by, the artistic imagination.

With the start of his new residence in New York in December 1970, Oiticica's previous practice became permeated by a budding fascination with the metropolis's cosmopolitan vibrancy. Within this context, his incessant drive to walk mirrored a desire conceptually to 'map' the city onto the self and, in turn, allow the self to become imbued with its energy, identity and topography. Over the course of the decade, Oiticica would pursue this idea in a number of conceptual, sculptural, multimedia and textual projects. The most notable of these included *Subterranea tropicália*, an unrealised participatory structure to be installed under Central Park; as well as *Penetrables*, installation-like spaces in which viewers could enter and embody an architectural space of their own; and finally *Newyorkaise*, an expansive and unfinished collection of poetic and

propositional writings centred on a conceptual engagement with New York. Despite the richness of these works, however, Oiticica's celebration of New York gave way to feelings marked by pessimism, discrimination and exile by the end of the decade. In 1978, he departed from New York and returned to his native Brazil, where he reactivated the notion of 'ambulatory delirium'.

In November 1978, he wrote *Delirium ambulatorium*, a short poetic proposition for an interactive performance conceived for an arts festival in São Paulo.[2] Calling upon audiences to traverse the outskirts of the city, observe its inhabitants, and collect natural materials and elements from the city's structures, Oiticica divorced *Delirium ambulatorium* from its original elated reflection of New York. Instead, he invoked an act of 'mapping' rooted in 'non-linear movement', and collective resilience against political dictatorship and worsening socio-economic divisions in Brazil. Returning to his earlier explorations of dance and walking in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro in participatory works such as *Tropicália* (1967) and *Parangolés* (1964) – and further echoing discourses around anthropophagy and postcolonial community theatre in Brazil – *Delirium ambulatorium* tapped into issues of race, visibility and cultural resilience.

While much scholarship has been devoted to Oiticica's installations and sculptural works, this chapter highlights *Delirium ambulatorium* as an oft-overlooked 'textual extension' of his practices.[3] It revisits its iteration as a performative text from 1978, arguing for its importance in connection to two of Oiticica's central ideas. The first was Oiticica's search for forms to convey what Guy Debord termed the 'psychogeographies', or playful and personal explorations of a city.[4] In Oiticica's practice, this manifested itself in terms such as 'supra-sensorial' to describe his wandering around Rio de Janeiro, and 'environmental artworks', for which he developed installation-like structures to convey the conceptual and sensorial encounters between bodies and the urban realm. The second importance of *Delirium ambulatorium* relates to Oiticica's interest in conceptually 'mapping' social, racial and economic divisions within city spaces. Within this framework, walking emerged as an artistic method- ology both to divest the self and to witness divisions along the lines of socio- economic status, race and class while allowing the self to be conceptually imprinted by these experiences.

This latter understanding resonates beyond Oiticica's own work and reflects a shared philosophy of urban movement, particularly in the works of artists exploring biography at the junction of racial and political divisions in city spaces. In its final section, this chapter examines how this was manifested in two performance-based artworks by artists of diasporic backgrounds: Pakistan-born Rasheed Araeen's one-off photo-documented walk *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)*, staged in London in 1977, and Singapore-born artist Lee Wen's performance series *Journey of a*

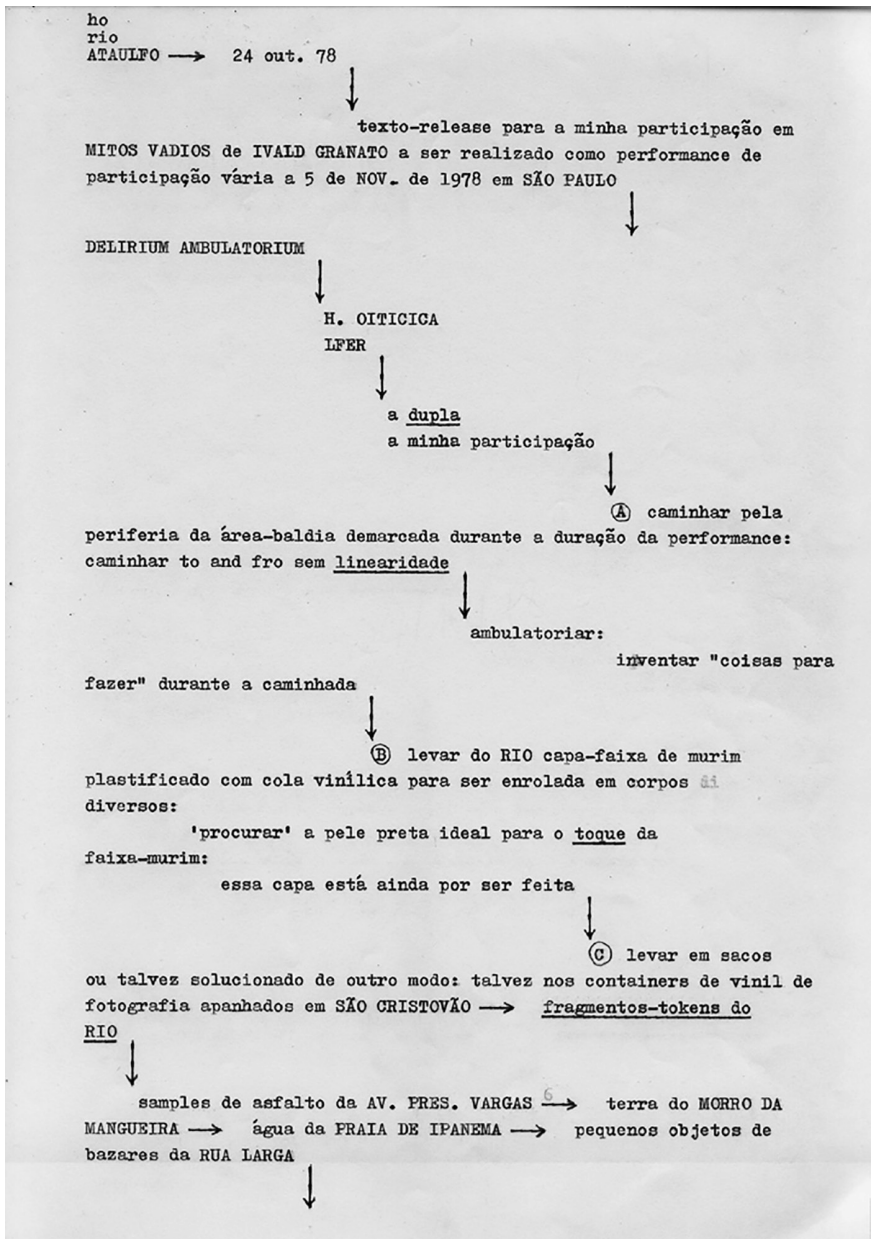
*Yellow Man*, also first staged in London in 1992, and subsequently performed internationally until 2001. This chapter aims to show not a direct historical influence, but rather a conceptual 'resonance' between the works of Oiticica, Araeen and Lee. Through this, it highlights a common ethos and commitment to walking as a charting of personal imagination and the self within urban spaces, as well as a gesture of decolonial 'ingestion' or 'digestion' of the metropolis's unwelcoming structures.

## Towards a methodology of non-linear movement

Soon after returning from an eight-year residence in New York, Hélio Oiticica wrote *Delirium ambulatorium* in Brazil on 24 October 1978 (see Figure 12.1). The piece took the form of a poetic and instructional 'proposition' for an interactive performance to be staged as part of the festival *Mitos vadios* (November 1978), organised by the artist Ivald Granato in São Paulo.[5] In the original, handwritten text, Oiticica deployed his characteristic fragmented statements interspersed with lines and arrows, suggestive of the movement of bodies and thoughts. Here, the artist announced his intention to 'walk to and fro without linearity' around the boundaries (or what he termed the 'wasteland') of São Paulo. Inventing a number of actions along the way, the artist would guide participants to wear self-made capes (a reference to his longstanding participatory performance *Parangolés*), as well as to collect 'token fragments' of the city such as sand, pieces of pavement and river water. Echoing his original reference of 'ambulatory delirium' in the aforementioned letter to fellow artist Lygia Clark from 1970, Oiticica once again invoked Clark's presence through an enigmatic quote on the process of mystification and demystification involved in the act of walking: 'They do and undo themselves like walking in the streets of the nocturnal delirium ambulatorium.'

As one of Oiticica's late propositions before the artist's untimely passing away in 1980, this text may be considered as a retrospective reflection upon his own practice.[6] It demonstrates Oiticica's return to a number of his earlier explorations. Here, the simple act of walking served as a conceptual 'mapping' of the self within the city, and vice versa. This interpretation emerges when *Delirium ambulatorium* is contextualised alongside Oiticica's experiments with space and spatiality in Brazil during the 1960s, before departing for Europe and the USA.

While Oiticica's early career was marked by explorations of colour and geometry as part of the neo-concrete movement in Brazil (1959–61),[7] his conceptually oriented works during the mid-to-late 1960s engaged directly with the lived realities of Brazil's cities. During this period, he developed the practice of walking or drifting through the city's poor neighbourhoods without a fixed objective – a practice that he related back to his teenage years. Drawn to



ho
rio
ATAULFO ⟶ 24 out. 78

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texto-release para a minha participação em MITOS VADIOS de IVALD GRANATO a ser realizado como performance de participação vária a 5 de NOV. de 1978 em SÃO PAULO

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DELIRIUM AMBULATORIUM

↓

H. OITICICA
LFER

↓

a dupla
a minha participação

↓

Ⓐ caminhar pela periferia da área-baldia demarcada durante a duração da performance: caminhar to and fro sem linearidade

↓

ambulatoriar:
inventar "coisas para fazer" durante a caminhada

↓

Ⓑ levar do RIO capa-faixa de murim plastificado com cola vinílica para ser enrolada em corpos di diversos:
'procurar' a pele preta ideal para o toque da faixa-murim:
essa capa está ainda por ser feita

↓

Ⓒ levar em sacos
ou talvez solucionado de outro modo: talvez nos containers de vinil de fotografia apanhados em SÃO CRISTOVÃO ⟶ fragmentos-tokens do RIO

↓

samples de asfalto da AV. PRES. VARGAS ⟶ terra do MORRO DA MANGUEIRA ⟶ água da PRAIA DE IPANEMA ⟶ pequenos objetos de bazares da RUA LARGA

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Hélio Oiticica, *Delirium ambulatorium*, 24 October 1978. **12.1**

exploring the areas of Rio de Janeiro where bodies had a prominent presence, such as the bohemian zone of Lapa and Mangué, which had the highest concentrations of sex workers, Oiticica went on to incorporate his impressions into a number of installations and performances in which the act of walking became synonymous with mapping.[8] In one of his most well-known works from this period, *Tropicália* (see Figure 12.2), Oiticica went as far as describing the installation as 'a map of Rio … and a map of my imagination'.[9]

*Tropicália* comprised a geometric maze containing materials such as sand, plants, gravel, a living parrot and even a television set that visitors could watch at the end of their experience.[10] For Oiticica, *Tropicália* was to be encountered as a sensory 'environment', or what he termed a 'supra-sensorial' experience.[11] As one of Oiticica's *Penetrables*, or works with labyrinthine

**12.2** Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália*, 1967.

structures, *Troplicália* was also built in such a way that the viewers could walk around in a non-linear manner and decipher the structure on their own terms. By actively encouraging individual perambulation, *Tropicália* thus mirrored Oiticica's wandering of Rio's favelas. And yet, it was not intended to serve as a literal map. Rather, it embodied Oiticica's imaginative charting of his observations and sensations of this urban reality, as well as his conceptual projection of himself onto the space. Here, the urban environment, whether performative or architectural, could become assimilated into the artist's body via movement or choreography (*corpocidade*) as it came into contact with the non-tangible elements of the city.[12] Simultaneously, space could imprint itself or cause transformations in the viewer (*corpografia*) when it acquired a social dimension.[13] As Luciano Figuereido has poignantly described this relationship: 'no favelas in Rio have spaces and environments that we could figuratively associate with the environment of *Tropicália*. We should focus rather on the existential meaning the favelas gave to his life, his art.'[14] This understanding of walking as an imaginative mapping of the self onto space, and vice versa, would later feature in *Delirium ambulatorium* as a site-specific methodology.

In addition to its emphasis on sensory experiences and impressions, Oiticica's understanding of walking from the 1960s also echoed what Guy Debord and the situationists described as 'psychogeography'.[15] This referred to playful, drifting encounters with urban environments aimed at breaking down the barriers between art and life. In a similar vein, Oiticica's early wanderings embraced playfulness and dynamic interactions with others.[16] Particularly influential for this was the artist's participation in the carnival as a *passista*, or samba dancer, in the favela of Morro da Mangueira in Rio de Janeiro. For Oiticica, samba represented an opposition to the intellectualisation of the repetitive movement in classical dance forms such as ballet.[17] Instead, it reflected a dynamic means of expression in which the body could absorb the spirit of the favela and mirror its physical and topographical, as well as cultural, political and social, stimuli.[18] Oiticica notably elaborated upon this fascination with irregular and socially produced movements in his renowned participatory dance capes, *Parangolés*. However, this also appeared in *Delirium ambulatorium*'s encouragement to enter into dream-like states and conduct poetic gestures in the urban realm: 'the streets and nonsense of our daily daydreams are enriched'.[19]

Speaking of Oiticica's interest in generating erratic and open-ended encounters, art critic Guy Brett has described a number of the artist's works as striving towards 'a non-repressive collectivism'.[20] This description situates *Delirium Ambulatorium* beyond the notion of 'psychogeography'. It draws attention to how Oiticica's call for a non-linearity and dream-like poetic encounters not only celebrated the dilapidated peripheries of São Paulo (as

Oiticica had once developed in relation to Rio de Janeiro's favelas and, later, towards New York). Instead, walking in *Delirium ambulatorium* also stood for an act of 'ingestion' akin to the discourses of anthropophagy in Brazil.[21] As articulated by Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade in the 'Anthropophagic manifesto' of 1928, anthropophagy evoked the eating of human flesh, including tissues and bones, as a metaphor for cultural appropriation. In a similar vein, *Delirium ambulatorium* called for an absorption and conceptual 'digestion' of found materials and fragments of the city during the walk – a gesture that Oiticica further elaborated as aiming to 'mythify/demystify'.

This evocation of mythology was, on the one hand, a direct reference to the title of the arts festival *Mitos vadios*, for which *Delirium ambulatorium* was conceived. On the other, it also pertained to the role of 'myths' around identity politics, and movements for democracy and decolonisation as they were being 'mapped' within the urban spaces of Brazil. As already noted by Oiticica in 1965:

> [The social layers] became somehow schematic, artificial for me, as if I was suddenly seeing from a great height their scheme. Marginalisation, which exists naturally for the artist, became suddenly basic for me, a complete 'lack of social place', and at the same time the discovery of my 'individual place' as a whole person in the world, as a social being in a common sense, not belonging to any elite, even an artistic one … social in its most noble sense.[22]

Echoing Brett's characterisation of Oiticica's work as 'non-repressive collectivism', this desire to expose myths and fabrications lent *Delirium ambulatorium* a strong affinity with social, participatory and activist practices, particularly as voiced by the Brazilian drama theorist Augusto Boal.[23] In *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974), Boal called for an activation of theatrical forms to reflect socio-political realities in the wake of postcolonial and authoritarian Brazil. Seen within this intellectual backdrop, *Delirium ambulatorium* similarly reflected a wider turn towards performative methodologies that could, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, chart 'the spatial practice of a society [which] secretes that society's space'.[24] This socio-political dimension of *Delirium ambulatorium*, in turn, lent Oiticica's works a wider resonance within artistic practices seeking to test the limits of conceptual and abstract art by way of walking in public and city spaces.

## Transnational resonance

The contextualisation of Oiticica's *Delirium ambulatorium* reveals an understanding of urban walking as rooted in both a personal exploration of space and an imaginative 'mapping' of the artist's body onto the city, and vice versa. However, speaking of this conceptual and performative relationship,

Oiticica did not adopt a homogeneous understanding of city spaces. Instead, he acknowledged the importance of historical developments and social predicaments in shaping what he described as the individual 'scenographic' nature of each city:

> Everything [in New York] is scenographic: even the street, do you understand? If you do something on the street it is not participation any more, people start to rationalise as if it were an 'event' and they call it installation. 'I'm going to do an installation in Washington Square, do you get it?' Then why not do it inside your house, since in New York there is not so much of a difference between the inside of a museum and the street? While in Brazil there is [a difference].[25]

This proposition yields a further insight into *Delirium ambulatorium*: namely, its insistence on the historical positionality of artists' own identities as they came into contact with different urban spaces. This lent Oiticica's works a transcultural adaptability that had a particular resonance in the context of London. *The Whitechapel Experiment* (1969) received praise for its novel explorations of participation in works such as *Tropicália* and *Ninhos* (*Nests*, 1969), but Oiticica's ideas had in fact circulated in London among artists working with performance art and kinetic and participatory art since the mid-1960s.[26] Particularly important for his legacy were the networks of the Signals Art Gallery (1964–66) in London and its accompanying publication, the *Signals Newsbulletin*, edited by Philippines-born artist David Medalla. Here, Oiticica's work gained a new following within the frame- work of 'kinetic art'. In works by Medalla, Jesus Rafael Soto, Lygia Clark, Sergio Camargo and Takis (Panayiotis Vassilakis), the kinetic art of Signals reflected an understanding of sculptural movement as a reflection of the artists' peripatetic lifestyles, as well as allegiances with socialist ideology and anti-dictatorial internationalism, particularly in relation to Asia and Latin America.[27]

While Oiticica was not present in London in person at this point, his inclusion in discussions at Signals on movement served to anchor his ideas around 'non-linearity', 'supra-sensorial' experiences and 'environments' within nascent conversations around identity politics and internationalism, which would later come to flourish in the UK between the 1970s and 1990s. In what follows, this chapter explores the resonance of Oiticica's ideas around urban movement (as they were expressed in *Delirium ambulatorium*) within two works initially staged in London by the artists Rasheed Araeen and Lee Wen, both artists whose practices show connections to Signals. While Araeen and Lee's works did not abide by the participatory dimension of Oiticica's practice, they echoed *Delirium ambulatorium*'s emphasis on conceptually mapping the self within socio-political, economic and racial terrains at given moments in time.

## Rasheed Araeen's *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977–78)

Parallel to Oiticica's explorations of dance and space upon returning to Brazil, the practice of walking through the city was investigated in a highly politicised way in the 1970s by UK-based artist Rasheed Araeen. Arriving in the UK from Pakistan in the early 1960s, Araeen engaged early on with minimalist and symmetrical geometric 'structures'. In the period from 1975 to 1982, his works took a decisive turn towards investigating how space, politicisation and identity could be manifested through conceptual art.[28] Deeply aware, via a personal friendship with David Medalla, of the work of Signals and its discourses, Araeen became increasingly preoccupied during the 1970s with performative and sculptural movement as a means of championing the causes of the 'Third World' and making visible the works of artists of diasporic backgrounds working in 'the West'.[29]

In 1978, Araeen voiced the need for the greater artistic and public presence of artists in a text titled 'Preliminary notes for a black manifesto'.[30] This text featured a disclaimer that it was not an objective analysis but a 'personal statement' whose knowledge was derived from Araeen's observations of modern art in Pakistan and his experiences as 'a third world man' with the art institutions in Britain. Here, Araeen stated:

> The experience of living in the West has led him [referring to himself] to *black consciousness* and to the awareness that HIS REAL PLACE IS IN THE THIRD WORLD. This is an attempt now on his part to re-examine his relationship with the West, and redefine his artistic role in the cultural context of his people, whether they live in their own countries or in the West.[31]

Calling on artists of Asian, Latin American and Afro-Caribbean origin to reassess and assert their contribution to contemporary art in Britain and the wider 'West', 'Preliminary notes for a black manifesto' argued for a break with the notion that western culture was superior to that of the Third World. The text concluded by inviting artists living and working in the 'West' to undertake a series of actions through which they demanded equal recognition and fostered greater exchange of information and ideas with their contemporaries in the Third World. By calling for a greater exchange, Araeen's manifesto intended to transcend the realm of academic discourses, and set in motion a series of real actions and exchanges in which artists devoted themselves to overcoming global inequalities.

In 1977, Araeen conceived a three-part series of performances to accompany this text. These were intended to visualise and explore Araeen's growing interest in the themes of cultural imperialism, discrimination, and the dynamics of how racial identities were formed and projected onto others.[32] The works were entitled *Towards the Centre and Back*, *Paki Bastard (Portrait of*


Rasheed Araeen, *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)*, image of the artist exiting Clifton Restaurant. Private performance, Brick Lane, London, 1977. **12.3**

*the Artist as a Black Person)* (see Figure 12.3) and *I'm a Noble Savage Come and Find Me*, and Araeen planned to stage them in front of a live audiences as part of the manifesto's outreach and call for action. While all three were planned in detail, only *Paki Bastard* was realised. The work comprised two parts: a private, photographically documented walk by Araeen around the area of Brick Lane in east London in June 1977, followed by a live performance enacted in front of an audience at the headquarters of the artistic collective Artists for Democracy on Whitfield Street in central London in July of the same year.[33] In the first part, Araeen set out to deploy walking as a means to explore his 'own body, its relationship to the culture I was living in and the environment and what was happening around'.[34] The performance commenced with a series of private actions that the artist staged on Brick Lane on a Sunday in late June. He

first entered the Clifton Restaurant (regularly visited by the artist) on dressed in a kurta and shalwar, which he had brought back from a visit to Pakistan in 1972–73.[35] He subsequently strolled around the area, drank tea and ate food, while his everyday actions were photographed by his wife, Elena Bonzanigo.

While Araeen has contested readings of this work as purely autobiographical, the performance undoubtedly drew on the everyday act of walking as a way of discreetly and conceptually asserting his own biographical trajectory into the wider landscape of discourses around geography, diasporic identity, migration, labour and exploitation.[36] Recounting how he regularly visited Brick Lane in the 1970s to drink tea and shop, Araeen selected this neighbourhood for the work as it represented one of London's urban areas strongly associated with histories of migration. Formerly the site of a thriving Jewish community, after the Second World War the area became a settlement site for the South Asian – particularly Bangladeshi-Sylheti – communities living in council housing.[37] Referred to colloquially as 'Banglatown', the area around Brick Lane became synonymous with ethnic ghettoisation in the popular media during the 1970s. Given the personal and political significance of this site, Araeen capitalised upon the location to convey both the sense of familiarity and the unease that he felt upon visiting the area in the aftermath of the Grunwick strikes of 1976–78, in which South Asian factory workers in northern England protested for better working conditions. Describing the tension between familiarity and unease, Araeen stated:

> what was happening in Brick Lane and what was happening in other areas was that Asian women were on strike against factories. There are two contradictory places: Brick Lane was a place of comfort (because when I used to feel nostalgic, I used to go to Brick Lane in the sixtis with my wife and sit in a café and drink tea or eat something; there was no other reason). So, that experience came back; I wanted to politicise that experience. At the end of the sixtis, there were the Skinheads. They used to go out and beat up Asian people. This is how the [idea for] *Paki Bastard* came about. I also heard on TV that some Pakistanis and Indians were beaten up by police during the strike and one person was called 'Paki bastard' by the police – these were the things happening at that time. I wanted to put them all together through my own experience and involvement because I *did* used to go to the strikes and join them sometimes.[38]

Carried out in an everyday context without the knowledge of passers-by that they were witnesses to and participants in a work of art, this method of performance-making was not new to Araeen.[39] Already, in 1962, the artist had staged a performance in Karachi in which he had walked down a public street in the name of art, thus expressing a criticism towards the lack of appreciation for modern art in Pakistan.[40] For *Paki Bastard*, Araeen once again looked to

render the everyday experience an artistic and political act. In the artist's own words, the act of documenting these journeys and the knowledge that these photographs would be incorporated into a later work of live art rendered his simple actions both artistic and political gestures: 'unlike my previous visits to this restaurant, what I was doing now was a performance of which people around were unaware of [*sic*], but part of.'[41]

Performed shortly prior to Oiticica's writing of *Delirium ambulatorium* in 1978, this performance echoes a similar, shared ethos towards self-documentation and urban walking as both an act of introspection, and an exposition or 'mapping' of ongoing socio-political struggles in east London. By carrying out a performative walk in which he mapped the perimeters of racially charged spaces in east London, Araeen also produced a personal cartography, charting his own biography and identity within the city. Alluding to other performances that had employed the black body as a source of antagonism and disruption of the public space – notably Adrian Piper's series *Catalysis* (1970–71) – Araeen's movements (and their documentation) further captured the discord the artist felt while being framed as a foreigner and Asian in Britain. Yet, to reduce Araeen's actions solely to political protest would not capture the true breadth of this work.

Returning to Oiticica's *Delirium ambulatorium* as a framework for understanding artists' city walks as both acts of personal exploration and a two-way mapping of the self onto space, Araeen's journey through east London may also be interpreted as a moment symbolically imbuing the body with the histories and rhetoric of that space at that specific moment in time. As further suggested by the presence of the derogatory term 'Paki bastard' in the work's title, Araeen's walk may be seen as a conceptual 'ingestion' (and 'digestion') of racist terms that had been used as acts of both aggression and resistance within the riots of east London.[42] Without producing any active community engagement, as seen in Oiticica's engagement with the favelas, Araeen's private walk instead turned to self-documentation, producing a series of photographs that yield glimpses into the different stages of the work. Functioning as a visual 'map' of the area, these photographs also charted the boundaries of Araeen's freedom to move around, see and be seen, within the heightened racial tensions of 1970s Britain.

## Lee Wen's *Journey of a Yellow Man* (1992–2001)

In contrast to the discreet, nonchalant nature of Araeen's walk, the performances of Singaporean artist Lee Wen (1957–2019) delved into mapping socio-political boundaries by making the presence of the walker hyper-visible. Recognised as one of Singapore's foremost performance artists, Lee is best remembered for his iconic series of performances titled *Journey*

*of a Yellow Man*. First enacted in London in 1992, this series saw the artist paint his nearly naked body (wearing only underwear) in acrylic yellow and perform ceremonial gestures with chains in galleries and public spaces. Conceived a total of fifteen times in various galleries, museums, city spaces and rural areas across Asia, the work has most often been analysed with a focus on Lee's yellow-tinted body as a signifier of ethnic and racial discrimination (a visual reference to the legacies of discriminatory systems of racial classification and orientalist discourses around the 'yellow peril').[43] However, *Journey of a Yellow Man* also began a relationship with its surroundings, particularly as it evolved away from a gallery-based act and towards a durational practice of urban walking.

*Journey of a Yellow Man No. 1* was first staged in April 1992 at the City of London Polytechnic in London, where Lee was studying. The performance's focus – as emphasised in the artist's statement – was a counteraction to the artist's perception that in London he was constantly being mistaken as Chinese.[44] Also performed in the aftermath of the seminal exhibition of Afro-Asian art curated by Rasheed Araeen at the Hayward Gallery in London, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Art in Postwar Britain* (1989–90), in which two artists, David Medalla and Li Yuan-chia – of East and Southeast Asian descent respectively – had been featured, *Journey of a Yellow Man* reacted to the notable absence of Southeast Asian artists within 'black British' art history.[45] For this enactment, Lee appeared in the persona of 'yellow man' and proceeded to perform a series of actions using a red chain and solid fuel in front of a small live audience. While this inaugural work took place indoors, subsequent iterations took place in public spaces, where walking emerged as one of his central actions. While always planned, and mediated by the presence of a camera, *Journey of a Yellow Man* also occasioned a setting for Lee to discover and document urban spaces within which the artist presented himself as other. As noted by June Yap:

> the notion of 'journey' is for him less of an actual perambulation during the performance – although the performance does involve some form of traversal – than it is a reference to cultural diaspora and its effects, a condition that may be seen as echoed in the movement of the body from performance artist and its representation, travelling from event to event around the world.[46]

Conceived a further fourteen times (not all of which were realised) between 1992 and 2001 across Singapore, India, Japan, Thailand, Mexico, Australia and China, each of the works' enactments evoked different readings when Lee's alter ego interacted with the specific contexts.[47] The second performance, *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 2: Fire and Sun*, in Gulbarga Karnataka, India, stressed connections to nature and outdoor landscapes. The third instalment, in Singapore in 1993, *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 3: Desire*, focused on the

gallery space once again, shortly predating Singapore's 1994 ban on performance art (following Joseph Ng's *Brother Cane*).[48]

With *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 5: Index to Freedom* (1994; see Figure 12.4), staged at the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan, Lee first extended the performance's remit to walking in an urban context. In a performance 'workshop' spanning five days, the artist performed a series of indoor actions (incorporating floor drawings with rice, and actions with chains), yet also ventured 'out for field study' into the city, as heralded by a sign hung in the gallery. Evoking ethnographic practices of 'traversing' foreign landscapes, as well as 'entering into' native communities, Lee's journey through the city is an ironic play on the scientific 'mapping' of unknown territories and communities. Meanwhile, his documented journeys across Fukuoka capture the encounters and ambience of the city and people's responses to his naked yellow body as he traverses shopping malls, the subway and alleys while holding a birdcage. Here, the relationship between the cartographer and his subjects became blurred – Lee both observed and documented, while simultaneously being observed and becoming a visual marker of otherness on the streets of Fukuoka.

In subsequent iterations, including *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 6: History and Self* at the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo in 1995, Lee developed a more close-knit visual conversation or response system between his city encounters and the actions performed inside the gallery. This practice culminated in *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 11: Multiculturalism* (1997), performed at the Substation in Singapore, which marked the first work in which Lee appeared in public wearing a suit painted yellow. With Lee subsequently partaking in a panel discussion, before publicly washing himself in a basin and distributing the yellow water to viewers in jars, this iteration of *Journey of a Yellow Man* marks the explicit ways in which his cartographies of public spaces offered a visual statement on the rhetoric of Singapore's multiculturalism policies, echoing what Kobena Mercer described as a state where cultural diversity was recognised and made visible as a marker of a ' "progressive" disposition'.[49] Describing the nature of policies supporting 'cultural diversity' in the UK, Mercer used the term 'multicultural exhibitionism' to describe funding schemes and exhibition opportunities that promoted the view that art could reflect Britain's cultural and ethnic minorities.[50] This idea of 'multicultural exhibitionism' is, however, also fitting to the form of *Journey of a Yellow Man*. Returning to the work's roots in London in 1992, Lee's walking yellow figure was at once an exploratory persona, producing a subtle conquest of foreign spaces, and at the same time a benign *persona non grata*, or an uninvited and hyper-present intruder and observer of otherness in real time.

Unlike Araeen's familiarity with Brick Lane, Lee's walk was one of embracing estrangement and caution within unfamiliar terrains. While on a visual


**12.4** Lee Wen, video still from *Journey of a Yellow Man No. 5: Index to Freedom*, Fukuoka, Japan, 1995.


12.4

level echoing works such as Günter Brus's *Vienna Walk* (1965), a series of performances in which the artist wore formal attire and painted his entire body white with the aim of presenting himself in public as a 'living picture',[51] Lee's colouration and public appearance may be read beyond the body as art object. Rather, the work has an affinity to the notion of 'ingestion' in Oiticica's *Delirium ambulatorium*. Documented in detail as he walked across various urban environments, Lee emerged as both as an object and the viewing subject, internalising his surroundings and asserting his space within them. The artist's inquisitive stare mirrors what Wenny Teo has described as the 'un/desirable guest' for whom cannibalism presents a metaphor for methodologies seeking to unravel the hidden histories, presences and cultures of Southeast Asia.[52]

Returning to the relationship between conceptualism and mapping, this chapter has singled out Hélio Oiticica's proposition *Delirium ambulatorium* as a central premise across a number of the artist's works. Unique to this concept has been its simultaneous emphasis on the personal and imaginative experience of walking through cities. Concurrently, *Delirium ambulatorium* also implies a mapping of the self onto the city space, and vice versa – a notion that has lent the concept deeply social, political and activist undertones. Looking beyond the individual work of Oiticica, this chapter has argued that *Delirium ambulatorium* as a concept has had resonances in the work of other artists dealing with the themes of diasporic identity and urban lived realities. Homing in on the examples of Rasheed Araeen and Lee Wen, it has emphasised the broader circulation of ideas around 'conceptual mapping' activated through walking, particularly in the context of artists working in a transnational or diasporic milieu in which public presence evokes a politically charged meaning. While neither of these examples invoked Oiticica's commitment to community interaction, they both embodied *Delirium ambulatorium*'s emphasis on walking as an act of integrating the self with the surroundings.

In light of these individual examples, the significance of *Delirium ambulatorium* may also be considered as a counterproposition, or extension of dominant analyses of conceptual art and identity politics. A number of studies on conceptual and performance-based practices by 'black' artists in the USA and Britain have emphasised expressions of 'radical presence' in public domains. The exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (2012), curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver, is one notable example of this approach focusing on artists' search to undermine racist and exclusionary discourses by 'charting' themselves as other in public spheres.[53] In the British context, Catherine Ugwu's influential publication *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (1995) similarly asserted that the exclusion of black artists from the canon of Euro-American art lay in their works' conceptual concerns and desires for visibility.[54] In contrast to these accounts, however, Oiticica's *Delirium ambulatorium* does not emphasise the visibility of the artist. Rather,

it spotlights the imaginative and deeply personal intersections through which the self becomes mapped on space, and space asserts an influence on the body. As reflected in Araeen's subtle gestures of drinking tea in Brick Lane, or Lee Wen's inquisitive look, *Delirium ambulatorium* does not insist on the representational function of the artist's body. Echoing Darby English's caution that not all works of 'black art' are about identity politics and that there is a need to explore the politics of representation itself, Oiticica's *Delirium ambulatorium* spotlights the subtle nuances as well as real and imaginative divisions between the body and the mapping of the self onto space.[55]

## Notes

1 Hélio Oiticica, letter to Lygia Clark, 8 August 1970, in Luciano Figueiredo (ed.), *Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica: Cartas, 1964–74* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora de UFRJ, 1996), p. 160.

2 On 12 November 1978, Hélio Oiticica participated in the event organised by the artist Ivald Granato in São Paulo entitled *Mitos vadios* (*Vagabond Myths*).

3 rederico Coelho has used the term 'textual extension' to describe the central role of Oiticica's writings as expanding upon his artistic practice. See Frederico Coelho, '*Subterranean Tropicália Projects → Newyorkaises → Conglomerado*: The infinite book of Hélio Oiticica', in Philomena Mariani and Katie Reilly (eds), *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* (New York: Prestel, 2017), p. 200.

4 Debord used the term 'psychogeography' in 1957 to describe the intersection between imagination and real space, a concept inspired by Charles Baudelaire's notion of a 'flâneur' wandering the urban environment in a playful way. Guy Debord, *Psychogeographic Guide of Paris* (Roskilde: Permild & Rosengreen, 1957).

5 *Mitos vadios* took place on 12 November 1978. See Moacir dos Anjos, 'As ruas e as bobagens: Anotações sobre o *delirium ambulatorium* de Hélio Oiticica', *ARS Sao Paulo* 10:20 (2021), 23–45.

6 Irene V. Small, 'Permanent evolution: Hélio Oiticica and the return to Rio, 1978–80', in Mariani and Reilly, *Helio Oiticica*, p. 266.

7 The neo-concrete movement in Brazil (1951–61) was developed by Rio de Janeiro's Grupo Frente, a collective of artists that worked on concrete art. Grupo Frente's members were Oliveira Bastos, Hélio Oiticica, Ferreira Gullar, Teresa Aragão, Bezerra, Mario Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, Vera Pedrosa, Ivan Serpa, and Lea and Abraham Palatnik.

8 Hélio Oiticica, *Materialismos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, SRL, 2013), p. 76. During his walks in the bohemian zones of Rio de Janeiro, Oiticica became friends with the sculptor Jackson Ribeiro, from Morro da Mangueira. Oiticica ended up joining the Mangueira samba school and parading as a *passista* at the Rio de Janeiro carnival between 1965 and 1968. The fact that the samba is considered an art form owes much to the *Parangolés*, since it was due to the popularity of the colourful fabrics that people were wearing when they danced the samba.

9 Hélio Oiticica and Guy Brett, 'Oiticica talks to Guy Brett', *Studio International* (March 1969), 134.

10 The individual elements of *Tropicália* may be contextualised within the tropicalism movement, one of the most influential artistic styles to champion Brazilian identity by embracing forms and aesthetics specific to Brazil's context. While Oiticica distanced himself from tropicalism on the grounds that he perceived it to be a discourse appropriated by the elite classes, *Tropicália* is recognised as one of the earliest formative artworks for this movement. Oiticica, *Materialismos*, p. 97.

11 *Ibid*., p. 39.

12 *Corpocidade* (corpocity) is a Portuguese term formed by *corpo* (body) and *cidade* (city). This term is used as a name by the research platform of a group of the Federal University of Bahia (Salvador de Bahia, Brazil). Their investigations are based on relations between the body and the city from an artistic point of view. See the website of *Plataforma Corpocidade*, www.corpocidade.dan.ufba.br (accessed 27 November 2019).

13 The term *corpografia* (corpography) was published in Augustin Berque, Alessia de Biase and Philippe Bonnin, *L'habiter dans sa poétique premiére: Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-salle* (Paris: Editions donner lieu, 2008). The city is also read by the body as a set of interactive conditions, and the body expresses the synthesis of this interaction by describing in its corporeality what we call urban corpography. Corpography is a body cartography, that is, part of the hypothesis that the urban experience is inscribed in various temporal scales, in the very body of the person who experiences it, and thus also defines it, even if involuntarily. F. D. Britto and P. B. Jacques, 'Cenografias e corpografías urbanas: Um diálogo sobre as relações entre corpo e cidade' *Cadernos PPG-AU/UFBA* 7:2 (2008), 79–86. For a discussion of these terms see Maria José Martínez Sanchez, *Dynamic Cartography: Body, Architecture and Performative Space* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 132–3.

14 Guy Brett and Luciano Figueiredo, *Oiticica in London* (London: Tate, 2007), p. 23.

15 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002).

16 Hélio Oiticica, *O aparecimento do suprassensorial in 'Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto'* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), p. 11.

17 *Ibid*., p. 130.

18 This point has been argued in Sánchez, *Dynamic Cartography*, p. 140. With these reflections, we approach the environmental policies that Peter Sloterdijk spoke about in his *Spheres* trilogy. Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, 3 vols (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2011–16).

19 Hélio Oiticica, *Delirium ambulatorium* (1978).

20 Guy Brett, *Hélio Oiticica: The Experimental Exercise of Liberty*, reprinted in Guy Brett, *Carnival of Perception: Selected Writings on Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2004 [1993]), p. 52.

21 The notion of 'ingestion' may be traced back to a preceding movement, anthropophagy (1928). First articulated by Brazilian writer Oswalde Andrade in the 'Anthropophagic manifesto,' published in the first issue of the *Revista de antropofagia*

(*Anthropophagy Magazine*), anthropophagy contrasted primitive Brazilian culture with the European models imposed on it that, together with native and national material, were essential in the cultural construction of Brazil. This movement took as its inspiration the cannibalistic rituals of some indigenous cultures, such as the Tupi Indians, with Andrade's motto 'Tupi or not Tupi', referring to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In doing so, anthropophagy evoked the eating of human flesh, including tissues and bones, as metaphoric of cultural appropriation. See Aleksandar Dundjerovic and Luiz Fernando Ramos, *Brazilian Performing Arts* (Madrid: Abada Editores, 2019), pp. 81–2.

22 Hélio Oiticica, 'Dance in my experience', in Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), p. 106.

23 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979).

24 H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 38.

25 Aracy Amaral, 'Hélio Oiticica: Tentativa a dialogo', in Aracy Amaral (ed.), *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio: Artigos e ensaios (1980–2005)* (Sao Paolo: Editora 34, 2006), Vol. III, p. 106.

26 See Guy Brett, *Kinetic Art* (London: Studio Vista and Reinhold Book Corp., 1968).

27 For discussion of kinetic sculpture and international allegiances see Chanon Kenji Praepipatmongkol, 'David Medalla: Dreams of sculpture', *Oxford Art Journal* 43:3 (February 2021), 339–59; and Isobel Whitelegg, 'Everything was connected: Kinetic art and internationalism at Signals London, 1964–66', in Catherine Spencer, Amy Tobin and Jo Applin (eds), *London Art Worlds* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2018), pp. 21–38.

28 In the artist's own words, 'It wasn't that I was defining identity – I had no problem with it. You see, I wanted to explore the idea of identity. I wanted to problematize it because it's not a simple thing like coming from one place in the world, possessing one culture, one country, one race, which are the things on which identity is primarily based. I wanted to caution against all of these things. So, it was a process of questioning identity, not asserting identity.' Eva Bentcheva, unpublished interview with Rasheed Araeen, London, 26 February 2014.

29 See Rasheed Araeen, 'Conversation with David Medalla', *Black Phoenix* (1979), 10–19.

30 'Preliminary notes for a black manifesto' was originally published in the first issue of the art magazine *Black Phoenix* in January 1978 and was reprinted in the journal *Studio International* later that year. The manifesto has been subsequently reproduced in Araeen's monograph: Rasheed Araeen, *Making Myself Visible* (London: Kala Press, 1984). See Rasheed Araeen, 'Preliminary notes for a black manifesto', *Black Phoenix: Third World Perspective on Contemporary Art and Culture* 1 (January 1978), 3–12.

31 Araeen, 'Preliminary notes', 12 (original capitalisation).

32 Araeen's increased interest in the political discourses around the cultural and religious identities of migrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean during the 1970s may be attributed to his own experiences of discrimination and racial politics in Britain. See John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

33 Writings on *Paki Bastard* have often failed to mention that this work began with a private performance in Brick Lane. Examples of texts that omit to mention the importance of Araeen's performance include Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Courtney J. Martin, 'Rasheed Araeen, live art, and radical politics in Britain", *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010), 107–24. In contrast, personal interviews with the artist have highlighted that he considered his actions in Brick Lane to be works of performance art that followed in the tradition of 1950s 'happenings' in New York and the work of Fluxus artists in Germany and the USA, in whose practices everyday acts and objects could be reinterpreted as works of art.

34 Bentcheva, unpublished interview with Araeen.

35 *Ibid*.

36 In a letter to a colleague dated 7 June 1978, Araeen stated 'although you are right about the autobiographical aspect of "Paki Bastard", the work as a whole is not autobiographical. I would rather describe it as "subjective".' Araeen, *Making Myself Visible*, p. 122.

37 For an overview of Bangladeshi settlements in east London see Ali Riaz, *Islam and Identity Politics among British-Bangladeshis: A Leap of Faith* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 18–45.

38 Bentcheva, unpublished interview with Araeen.

39 Allan Kaprow has described the staging of 'happenings' as situating art amid everyday life, without viewers necessarily being aware that they are witnessing the making of art. See Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966). While Araeen has not commented upon drawing directly upon the model of happenings, numerous happenings had been staged by international artists in the UK during the 1960s, and by the 1970s performance-making of this kind was well known in the UK. For a discussion of the popularity of happenings in Britain during the 1960s see Deirdre Heddon, 'The politics of live art', in Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein (eds), *Histories and Practices of Live Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 181.

40 Bentcheva, interview with Araeen.

41 Unpublished email correspondence with Rasheed Araeen, 7 December 2013.

42 Drawing on a quote by fellow artist Dominic Dawes, in which the artist commented: 'In our towns and cities, on our subways and walls, etc., and just as much in our minds, there is racial abuse: Wogs go home, N.F. [National Front] rules, Black Bastards, etc. but who made us the so-called "bastards"?'. Dominic Dawes, artist's statement, in *The Pan-Afrikan Connection* (exh. cat.) (London: Africa Centre, 1982), unpaginated.

43 Wenny Teo, 'The long journey of a "yellow man": Remembering Lee Wen (1957–2019)', *Frieze*, www.frieze.com/magazines/frieze-magazine/issue-206?_ga=2.70414934.771586231.1600605621–1085142295.1593183476 (accessed 28 September 2020).

44 Alice Ming Wai Jim, 'Lee Wen: Performing yellow', *Afterall*, https://afterall.org/journal/issue.46/lee (accessed 28 August 2020).

45 The development of black art in the 1980s is often seen as culminating in Araeen's *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (29 November 1989–4 February 1990). This is regarded as the first exhibition of 'black British artists' in a major museum. See Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989).

46 June Yap, 'I feel the earth move', in *Lee Wen: Lucid Dreams in Reverie of the Real* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2012), p. 49.

47 'Lee Wen', *Asia Art Archive*, https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/lee-wen-archive (accessed 27 August 2020).

48 Jim, 'Lee Wen'.

49 Kobena Mercer, 'Ethnicity and internationality: New British art and diaspora-based blackness', *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* 13:49 (1999), 51–4.

50 *Ibid*., p. 57.

51 For a description of Brus's performance as a 'living picture', see Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 56.

52 Wenny Teo, 'The un/desirable guest: Hospitality, effective history and the (post) colonial archive', in Erika Tan (ed.), *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014), pp. 10–14.

53 *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver, was exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (17 November 2012–15 February 2013), the Studio Museum in Harlem (14 November 2013–9 March 2014), and Grey Art Gallery in New York (10 September–7 December 2013), finally showing at the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis (24 July 2014–4 January 2015).

54 Catherine Ugwu, *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts and Bay Press, 1995), p. 57.

55 Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).