

Aura & Perception: A Guided Walk

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Foreword

Throughout the development of my project, I seek to interact with multiple senses and to use the pace of walking as a means to provide situations for a deeper perception of place to be developed. The Humber River trail serves as the base of operations in terms of where my final guided walks were conducted. My research involves developing and amplifying ideas surrounding perception, context, and the exploration into blurring the lines between nature and civilization.

The overall goal was to develop a visual storyboard through the creation of a collaborative map in conjunction with the use of virtual reality technology that will serve to express the context of a specific place and the various levels of perception involved in its history. My research also involves using place-based education and public engagement to highlight the importance of a specific site within a larger context surrounding visual culture.

Abstract

Woodbridge represents one of four historic villages situated within the City of Vaughan. These early settlements provided the groundwork for the beginning of a rich cultural heritage. Using walking as a medium to explore green-spaces within the context of Woodbridge can aid in critically examining the role in which green-space can play in shaping the context of a particular community. My project functions as an outlet to express this empathy towards green-space and allow participants to further value and defend green-space within their own towns or cities. Engagement of place through walking allows for the nuanced attention to a place which can be influenced by the diverse history of the surrounding natural environment using visual culture as a direct way of presenting this history.

This project will encompass ideas of how the green-space of the Humber River trail within the William Granger Greenway can be incorporated within an urban community and how the culture of the community can be shaped by the landscape surrounding it as well as being able to recognize that the natural world can coexist within an urban setting rather than exists as two separate entities. I critically engage the general public to be able to create a meaningful dialogue surrounding each individual's perception of a space. Residents of Woodbridge are going to be engaged with throughout this project as a means of providing a baseline of individual knowledge regarding the town and the importance of green-space within an urban setting. This includes determining if individuals have ever interacted with the Humber River Trail and how their perception of this space can be further developed through each walk. I view this project as a responsibility to convey this significant piece of shared history where participants can acknowledge the land within the city in a positive manner as well as to further develop the role that green-spaces can play in teaching and learning the historical narratives of a community. Ultimately, moving through space will invite participants to build awareness of the green-space surrounding them and to be able to better perceive, appreciate and defend green-space from further urban development.

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“Freedom to walk is not much use without someplace to go” (Solnit, 249).

Introduction & Background

Perception of place is important to my project as I seek to reflect on and amplify modes of perception, including sense of place, and blurring the lines between so-called natural and built environments. I used walking as a medium to explore green-spaces within the Woodbridge community. In terms of the scope of my project, the idea of using walking to explore a particular green-space was significant in examining the role in which these spaces can play in shaping the overall context of a specific community. Walking acted as an outlet to express empathy towards green-space and allowed participants to evaluate the importance of defending communal green-space within their own cities. The engagement of place through walking also brought elements of diverse history surrounding the Woodbridge community to the forefront. Using visual culture, my walks incorporated the natural environment into the narrative regarding the growth and development of such diverse histories within Woodbridge rather than separate the two entirely. My walk, *Aura and Perception: A Guided Walk* encompassed ideas of how the green-space of the Humber River trail within the William Granger Greenway can be merged with a developing urban community.

Place vs. Space

During the conceptual phases of my guided walking project, I sought to work towards using multiple sensory triggers in tandem with walking as a means to provide individuals with an opportunity to reflect on their perception of a particular place. The Rebecca Solnit quote at the beginning of this paper connotes the importance of walking in terms of this project as a whole, as well as using walking to move throughout life on a daily basis. Walking and the movement of

our bodies provide people the freedom to explore spaces and give individuals freedom of choice in terms of their final destination. For my final project: *Aura and Perception: A Guided Walk*, I offered participants the same freedom of exploration through walking with the inclusion of several sensory activities. Although the path was predetermined, participants were given many opportunities to interact with their surroundings along the walk that would not be possible if travelling down the same path using another mode of transportation. Ultimately, the act of walking gave participants an opportunity to engage with a specific place with a level of detail that allows for a perceptual shift in the way that place is viewed. For my final guided walk through the Humber River trail I looked towards incorporating the difference between the terms place and space as a central theme of my project. I looked to the definition of both concepts given by Yi Fu Tuan to support my research questions and to provide participants with the appropriate conceptual knowledge of the guided walk prior to taking a walk. According to Tuan, space is referred to as being a simple, abstract concept of location. In this sense, space also refers to a location, in a proper geographic sense, as a blank canvas. Meaning, space, as a concept, has no added social value (Tuan 4). In contrast to this, Tuan addresses the concept of place as a construct with much more specificities (Tuan 6). For my guided walk, I worked through Tuan's definition of place as individuals giving meaning to 'space.' For example, as explained to participants in the opening minutes of the walk, the community of Woodbridge was defined as a 'space' whereas the trail in which I conducted the guided walks was defined much more specifically as a place in which we individually and as a group would give meaning through our investigations of aura, perception, and the senses.

Walter Benjamin's Aura

Another central theme that was incorporated into my guided walk in tandem with the concepts of place and space was the concept of aura in Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Although Benjamin is referring to the development in art making of the time where a copy of an artwork would be void of the original artwork's aura, I want to consider the concept of aura as an extension of meaning imbued on place. So in other words, rather than thinking about the aura of an original artwork I'm thinking of the aura of place. Benjamin explains that aura creates a desire of contemporary masses to bring things closer both spatially and humanly (Benjamin 223). According to Benjamin, aura can be attached to works of art alongside the notion that any piece of visual artwork that is reproduced through mechanical reproduction will experience a decay of said aura (Benjamin 221). Aura is sensed by the viewer and is beyond the visual perception of the artwork. Therefore, Benjamin regarded aura as an attempt to close the gap between the viewer and the object in both a physical and emotional sense. Through Benjamin's writing, I understand that the rise of mechanically reproduced works of art consistently diminish the aura of an object or image that is said to hold significance to the viewer. His text addressed modernity and the mass production of print media. Benjamin argued that the copy did not hold the same aura as the original and that by making a copy the original glowed with value. However, through my guided walking project, there are ways in which Benjamin's aura is challenged in today's digital age.

During my guided walks I sought to encourage natural spaces to be like an original artwork and to emit a kind of aura for the participants of my work. I brought participants closer in relation to places along the trail by engaging them in activities and exercises centered on the senses, perception, and the importance of developing a sense of place. At the beginning of the

walk, I explained to participants that sense of place is defined as “the way we perceive places such as streets, communities, cities or eco-regions—how we describe and interact with a place, what we value in a place, our respect for ecosystems and other species etc. Our sense of place also reflects our historical and experiential knowledge of a place, and helps us imagine a more sustainable future” (Adams et. al. 1). The way in which individuals perceive a particular place is important because of the deep integration of walking and how it is used in developing and amplifying modes of perception, context of place, and the exploration into blurring the lines between nature and civilization.

As another example, Jakob Von Uexkull outlines the main varying factors that help to define place versus space in relation to aura and walking. To envision this place versus space dichotomy, Von Uexkull asks us to imagine that we are walking through a meadow. Within that meadow there appears a soap bubble around each creature that represents its own world, filled with the perceptions, which it alone knows. When we ourselves then step into one of these bubbles, the familiar meadow is transformed and new relationships appear (Evernden 79). The term that is used to describe the world inside the soap bubble of every creature is known as “Umwelt.” To further explain the concept of Umwelt in relation to my guided walks, an example looking into the life of a wood tick can be used. Both literally and figuratively, the wood tick is blind to human’s perception of the world. What humans perceive about the environment is unknown, and unknowable to the tick, and irrelevant. As such, there are only three essential elements in which the tick can perceive and rely upon: light, sweat, and heat (Evernden 79). Ultimately, the tick only sees what is significant to it, and what helps the tick survive. My project looked at exploring the Umwelt surrounding the Humber River trail in Woodbridge and how participants can navigate this Umwelt through various senses to perceive the environment in a

different manner. Walking through designated trails has the ability to teach compassion; it allows us to see how our actions affect the world around us. Many trails have markers, which urge visitors to not step off the designated paths and to not disturb the ongoing natural processes around them. In addition, walking through green space can be likened to the act of walking through an art gallery. Much of the joy of these two experiences comes from aesthetics. When entering a new natural space or gallery for the first time, this can create a sense of wonder through the opportunity for participants to physically escape a consumer/car-oriented culture.

Using photography, drawing and sound mapping, my guided walks sought to encourage participants to consider the aura and affect of so-called natural spaces. According to MacIntyre et. al., there can be a stronger relationship between aura and the presence of natural landscapes. MacIntyre applies the concept of aura to objects or place and explains “The aura of an object or place is the combination of its cultural and personal significance for a user or group of users” (MacIntyre 2004). My guided walks focused on ideas surrounding the aura of place. The aura of place has reflective potential, as stated by Rebecca Solnit, “When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back, the more one comes to know them the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities” (Solnit 13). I incorporated the use of senses in conjunction with walking to further develop this closeness Benjamin was referencing through memory, emotion, and perception. My proposition at the end of the two guided walks was what significantly challenges Benjamin’s notion of aura. This appears in the rise of the two most influential forms of mechanical reproduction, which have the ability to mimic the effects of aura today—virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR).

Artists who use digital media to create works of art can produce works that are not restricted by their embodiment within the confines of a physical object (Legrady 1999). According to George Legrady, any work of art that is produced through digital means is free from the overall constraints of materiality (Legrady 1999). This release from materiality comes in the form of numeric data (digital), which can be easily transported and accessed through various storage devices such as hard drives, disks, and CD-ROMs (Legrady 1999). Legrady views the use of digital media as a way to be able to bring about this “closeness” of perception. My guided walks focused on how human perception of natural spaces can be amplified to develop a meaningful narrative amongst participants.

Drawing upon work done surrounding photography walking tours by Janet Fink, the visual aspects of my own guided walks functioned to present perceptions of participants along the walk. Participants of Fink’s photography walking tour explained that, “Images offer a very particular view of the meanings and experiences of community, which is often further reinforced by places and activities selected for inclusion in the tour” (Fink 8-9). Within my guided walks, participants were encouraged to point the camera and actively choose what they are photographing to develop their own personal narratives of the walk.

Public Engagement and Perception

Lastly, my guided walking project reflects the need to engage the public within green space to provide a deeper understanding surrounding the significance of human perception within today’s car oriented society. In doing so, I incorporated several popular education techniques revolving around sensory activities that helped to engage participants with my research as well as to develop the final visual presentation of the narratives discussed throughout the guided walks. For example, one significant popular education activity that was crucial for the

development of my project was place-based education. Place-based education helps promote learning within a local environment through investigating the history, environment, and culture of a specific locality beginning with the strong presence of indigenous communities throughout the area. My guided walks considered the contrast between the overlap of green-space and urban settings. Therefore, place-based education strengthens the potential of perception of place. The location of the walks was within the city of Vaughan surrounded by numerous major roadways and within a car-centered suburb. As such, the main reason I chose this site for the guided walks goes back to an article written by Randy Haluza-DeLay titled “Re-mystifying the City.” DeLay explains that for educators to achieve the goal of engaging young people to care for the environment, we must assist them to recognize that the natural world not only exists in the wild, but also in the familiar places of any given urban setting (Haluza-DeLay 2013). Although this guided walk did not engage younger members of the Woodbridge community, the significance was placed on being able to recognize that the natural world can coexist within an urban setting rather than exists as two separate entities.

Through this walk I created conditions for participants to construct their own aura of the walking site. Conversations and sharing of personal narratives arose consistently throughout the walk, and this was a key part of the engagement and perception of place experienced by participants. Examining Pablo Helguera’s book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* in relation to place-based education, socially engaged art (SEA) can be an effective tool within the realm of public engagement. According to Helguera, “All art invites social interaction; yet in the case of SEA it is the process itself—the fabrication of the work—that is social” (Helguera 11). By inviting members of the public to participate in specific activities, SEA engages the public into what Helguera refers to as actual practice rather than merely symbolic practice. Actual practice

means making work that transforms the public sphere. Public engagement arose throughout the walk in the form of conversations surrounding the perception of place, constructs of aura, and the use of multi-sensory place-based learning techniques as a way to bring this aura of green-space to the forefront. Overall, the artwork as well as photographs created by participants will be used to create the final art installation at York University.

Methods

The beginning of my research process in preparation for my final exhibit consisted of gathering a comprehensive reading list of works related to walking, perception, and moving within nature. This reading list was constructed to strengthen my preliminary knowledge surrounding my research topic and my main research questions. This preliminary bibliography consisted of works responding to Walter Benjamin's understanding of aura, defining perception and the use of senses in nature, the significance of visual culture in relation to my project, as well as several pieces of writing which detail other significant walking projects that have been organized prior to my project being conducted. The development of this reading list guided me to comprise an art installation literature review. This literature review offers an in depth analysis of several highly publicized walking projects performed throughout the world.

Places, Projects & the Art of Walking: A Review on Walking

The act of walking is an artistic mode that conveys narratives surrounding the relationship between an individual and their environment. Whether this environment is found within urban landscapes or immersed in a secluded natural habitat, walking can be used in numerous ways to investigate the history of a place, and the interwoven stories that arise from these walks in relation to an individual's mind and body. Place and space are two terms that play a crucial role in developing this relationship. For this paper, I emphasize the importance of the

specificities of a place rather than the wider scope of a space. Each art project discussed has a critical relationship with the place chosen to conduct the project using walking as the medium. In addition, each project chosen for this literature review has specificities that blend with my own research in regards to the significance of walking as an artistic medium and the use of senses and perception to heighten such an experience. Moving from my own research project on a local level to a larger, yet confined scale within Canada, and finally looking at walking projects globally, this paper reflects on the history of a place and how participants interact with different places when such histories are made apparent through storytelling and different modes of perception.

To begin on a much smaller local level, my research involves developing and amplifying ideas surrounding perception, context, and the exploration into blurring the lines between natural and built environments through the creation of a guided walk. My guided walk, *Aura and Perception: A Guided Walk* took place along the Humber River trail within the William Granger Greenway located in the town of Woodbridge, Vaughan. Woodbridge is considered a small suburban town with a rich and diverse history that sets the backdrop for the context of my walk. The goal of my walk was to use walking and place-based educational practices as a means to explore suburban green-spaces within Woodbridge and critically examine the role in which such green-spaces can play in shaping the context of a particular community. In addition, the guided walk drew on the influence of Walter Benjamin's theory of aura. The desire to bring things closer to the participants of my walk was highlighted through the completion of several exercises surrounding the senses and perception, and the investigation into the importance of developing a sense of place. For my work, a sense of place can be defined as the way we perceive places such as streets, communities, cities or eco-regions—how we describe and interact with a place, what

we value in a place, our respect for ecosystems and other species etc. (Adams et al. 1). My guided walk, like the others mentioned throughout this paper, incorporated local history within their educational practices to further emphasize and develop this sense of place.

Through my walk, I make it my priority to acknowledge the presence of the several Indigenous communities, which inhabited the land before being displaced by colonization. I see this as my responsibility as an educator and a settler inhabitant of this land to share and reflect on this history collectively with others. As well, this history is significant because of the impact it had on the development of the early settlement of Woodbridge and represents what the town has become today. This brief history can be seen in the timeline noted as **Image #1** and **Image #2**.

When speaking in regards to guided walks that are rooted in Canada, one such walk arises. This particular walk entitled *Blind Field Shuttle* was first organized by Vancouver based artist Carmen Papalia. Papalia is a visually impaired artist whose main theme of these walks parallels my own sensory walks in Woodbridge. Papalia's walks consisted of enlisting participants to link their arms together and walk through the Haverford College campus with their eyes closed entirely (Cachia 12). Although the main focus of Papalia's walks are to navigate using other senses besides vision, and also the agreement of trust between all the participants, I reference Papalia's work, because of the non-visual shifts in perception where participants tour both rural and urban spaces on foot (Cachia 12).

Timeline



1875 Additions made to school at present day 8000 Kipling Avenue

1877 Construction of Woodbridge Presbyterian Church at present day 7971 Kipling Avenue



1882 Incorporation of Woodbridge as a Village



1862 John Abell's Agricultural Implement factory opens, bringing prosperity to Woodbridge

1871 Narrow gauge Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway opens - Track runs along west side of present day Kipling Avenue. Station located around present day 325 Woodbridge.



1878 Woodbridge Village Plan and Lot Plan as published in The Historical Atlas of the County of York. Present Day Kipling Ave divides concessions 7 and 8. TGB station shown at present day Kipling and Woodbridge.



1883 Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway acquired by Canadian Pacific. CPR relocate line through village to cross Kipling Ave. at Porter Road and begin construction of New CPR station opposite Porter Road.

1885 Abell fails to secure railway extension to his factory. Relocates to Toronto

1890 Farmers take part in riots protesting against toll roads in Woodbridge

1890's Population of Woodbridge falls following removal of Abell's factory

Image #1: Timeline depicting the development of the Woodbridge community from the years 1862- 1890.

Timeline

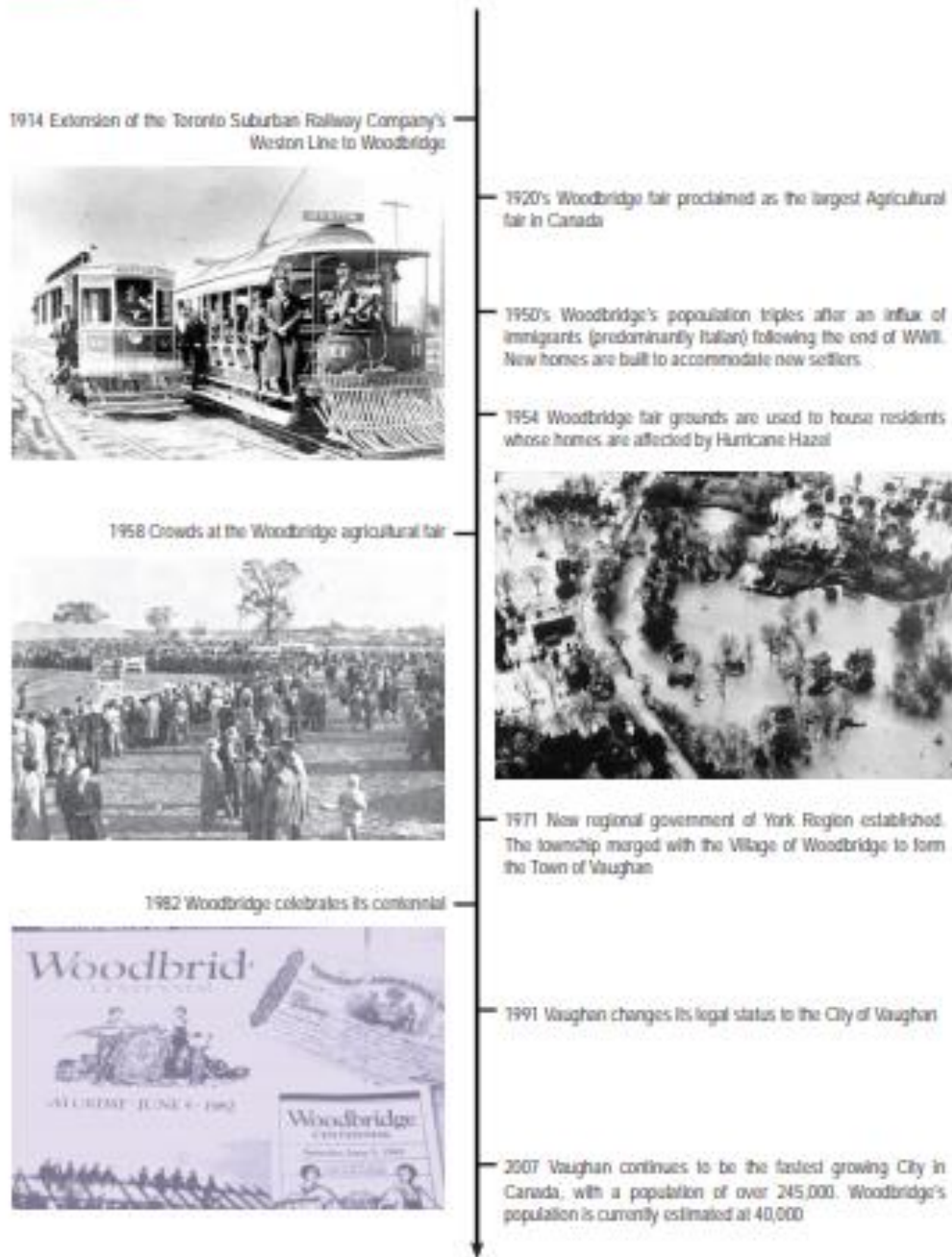


Image #2: Timeline depicting the development of the Woodbridge community from the years 1914-2007.

Forming a line behind Papalia, participants were asked to grab the right shoulder of the person in front of them and shut their eyes for the duration of the walk. Papalia then served as a tour guide—passing useful information to the person behind him, who then passed it to the person behind them and so forth (Cachia 13). Although my guided walks do favor the visual sense, there are portions of my walks that allow for participants to use senses besides vision to heighten their own perception of their surroundings.

For example, one of the major activities that take place during my walks is the close-listening exercise. This particular exercise favors the auditory sense and allows participants to slow their pace down even further than simply walking through the trail. This exercise required participants to close their eyes for a total of two minutes. Within this time frame participants were asked to listen carefully to their surrounding and commit these sounds to memory for the duration of the activity. Once the two minutes have elapsed, participants were given a piece of blank paper. On the paper they were asked to label each side with the four directions of a compass: North, South, East, and West. For the sake of this exercise participants were told that North would represent the direction that they are currently facing. From this point, participants were asked to create a sound map using all of the auditory triggers that were observed during their time with their eyes closed. My own work differs from Papalia's in the sense that Papalia's work is about access and he seeks to consider access as a long-term process. He developed an accessibility manifesto that includes five open access tenets as part of an anti-policy approach to accessibility. (Papalia "Accessibility"). My walks do favor visual cues; I thought that it would be significant to include other sensory aspects to further encourage an individual's perception of the trail. With both the close-listening exercise and the investigation of Papalia's walks, participants will be able to grasp new ways of orienting themselves within a specific environment. As seen

with Papalia's work as well as my close-listening activity I suggest that the removal of one specific sense can actually aid in further understanding the physical movement of the terrain beneath us and allow us to critically examine a landscape through different experiences.

One of the larger scale walking projects that influenced my guided walk comes in the form of the redevelopment of the High Line railway system in New York City. Recognized worldwide as being one of the most iconic urban landmarks and public spaces of the early 21st century, the re-conceptualized High Line railways system continually "stimulates public interest in landscape design while reintegrating an industrial relic in everyday life in New York City" (Lindner et. al. 1). In a similar way, my guided walks redefine the perception of natural landscapes situated in urban settings. The repurposed High Line railway system blurs the lines between the industrial and the natural. The physical structure of the High Line itself is a steel railway viaduct that weaves through the West side of Manhattan. This viaduct was constructed from 1929-1934 and was initially intended to relieve street-level congestion and safety hazards via lifting the railway twenty feet overhead to allow for more efficient transport of food products from the waterfront to warehouses, factories, and slaughterhouses (Lindner et. al. 5-6). In 1999 two resident from Manhattan, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, met at a community board hearing that addressed future plans for the now disused High Line viaduct. In the end, both residents expressed their concern to save the High Line from demolition but were ultimately unsure of how they would go about transforming the space. From this thought, David and Hammond founded Friends of the High Line (FHL); a non-profit organization solely dedicated to preserving the railway and transforming it into the High Line Park (Lindner et. al. 8). The attention given to the High Line revitalization project attracted support from incoming Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Bloomberg decided that the pros of reusing the railway outweighed

demolition and that any reuse should be focused on tending to the pedestrian rather than revert back to railway usage (Lindner et. al. 8).

With my guided walk, I provided participants an opportunity to experience natural landscapes of historical significance while addressing the dichotomy of the urban and natural and how one's experience with these landscapes changes when movement is involved. Since the repurposed High Line railway is elevated from the city streets below, the railway now offers an exclusive experience of being within, yet separate from, the city (Lindner et. al. 1). The new High Line Park therefore offers the public two drastic ways of viewing the landscape. "The repurposed railway park looks out onto the former industrial districts of New York City and the waterfront, which dramatizes the creative reintegration of disused infrastructure and revives the nostalgic pastime of the urban promenade" (Lindner et. al. 1).

Although not repurposed as drastically as the High Line Park, my guided walks through the Humber River trail creatively integrate the urban landscape surrounding the area with the natural through the use of various senses and perception based activities. To capture the dichotomy of the urban and natural landscapes, slow looking and close listening exercises were completed. Slow looking utilized the visual in which participants can evaluate their surroundings through photography as a means to convey their findings. This activity had participants documenting moments of interest throughout the walk and allowed for the aura of the walking trail to be captured and viewed, which can trigger memory after the walk is concluded. The close listening exercise favored the participant's auditory sense in contrast to the visual.

In this activity, participants get the opportunity to navigate the trail through the creation of a sound map. A sound map consists of recreating the surrounding environment based on the sounds heard in various directions. Both the visual and auditory activities are designed to

emphasize the dichotomy between walking through green-space situated within an urban setting similar to the purpose of the reintegrated High Line Park. To emphasize the importance surrounding the use of walking in regards to the link between the well-being of an urban neighborhood and exploring green-space through walking, past Mayor of New York City and supporter of the High Line Park, Michael Bloomberg offers insight. Bloomberg states, “New York City would be unlivable without its parks, trees, and open spaces. They provide aesthetic relief, enhance our health, add to our enjoyment, and increase our property values. Where parks have been revitalized, the neighborhoods have blossomed with new life. Where public open spaces have been renovated, the surrounding areas have become cleaner and more secure” (Lindner et. al. 8-9). This direct link between the development of parks and natural spaces within urban environments is a significant factor in regards to why the High Line railway system was initially saved and repurposed.

Although the Humber River trail in Woodbridge has not undergone such a drastic revitalization process as was done with the High Line Park, the trail continually offers the public a place in which to relax their minds and rejuvenate themselves spiritually and emotionally through walking. The first portion of the Humber River trail that was used for my guided walks is 3.5 kilometers in length and provides public access to the McMichael Canadian Art Gallery and the Boyd Park conservation area. This trail meanders through Woodbridge and Kleinburg, offering participants the chance to experience the trail two different ways. What is meant by this is that there are significant portions of the trail that are so far removed from any urban influences that one would never assume that the Humber River trail was an urban recreation trail. However, there are also significant portions of the trail, which weave the urban influence back into the natural. For example, the first portion of the trail starts by leaving the parking lot, which is

located directly off the shoulder of Rutherford Road in Vaughan. Another instance comes near the end of walking the trail in which individuals have the opportunity to pass directly underneath a concrete bridge as part of Major Mackenzie Road leading up to the McMichael Art Gallery in Kleinburg. What this shows, is that both the High Line Park and the Humber River trail do not dichotomize the natural and urban; rather, both use walking in combination with the other senses of sight and sound to promote the natural while at the same time incorporating the urban to create a much more aesthetic experience.

One of the ways in which I created a richer aesthetic experience with these trails is through the development of aura. As stated previously, Walter Benjamin's concept of aura can be defined as any essence of an object (or in this case a landscape) in which an individual will attempt to bring themselves closer to both physically and humanly.

Lindner et. al., addresses bringing participants closer to a place physically. Although not directly linked with the concept of aura provided by Benjamin, Lindner et. al., build off of work done by John Dixon Hunt. Known as "haunts," Hunt argues that numerous great gardens and places of inspiration such as the melancholic and hidden gardens of Venice have gifted him the feeling of a "greater perfection" (Lindner et. al. 25). Hunt goes on to state, "such places are haunted by undeniable spirits, wherein the environment can become landscape" (Lindner et. al. 25). Comparable to aura, these "haunts" play a critical role in shaping how an individual imagines or thinks about a place while either being physically present in or reimagining a specific memory of a place. Rather than viewing these "spirits" as any form of mystical essence, Hunt attaches the term "spirit" to the imagination and to the fictions and designs that create a lasting presence. One such way this occurs when speaking towards both the High Line as well as my own walk along the Humber River is the importance of the specificity of site. Linder et. al.,

writes, “A close reading of a particular site’s attributes—its history, its various representations, its context, and its potentials—conspires to inform a new project that is in some way an intensification and enrichment of a place” (Lindner et. al. 24). Therefore, every site is an accumulation of local forces over time. This can evidently be seen within the timeline of the development of New York’s High Line in that it stands as something greater than simply a transformed piece of infrastructure. The High Line itself represents the history that has preceded its development, the present status within the city, as well as the future.

In a similar instance, my walk through the Humber River trail shares this idea of Hunt’s “haunts” and the overall importance of a particular place’s attributes when traversing through them. The Humber River trail as well as the surrounding city of Woodbridge offers individuals a chance to explore how the urban and natural aspects of our world combine to create a new landscape through a retelling of history. As with the retelling of the history regarding the High Line in New York City, the sharing of the story surrounding the Humber River trail and the development of the town of Woodbridge share both similarities and distinct differences. To quickly address the main difference between the two histories, the development of the High Line primarily focuses on the refurbishment and re-integration of an industrial relic back into a highly urbanized area within North America.

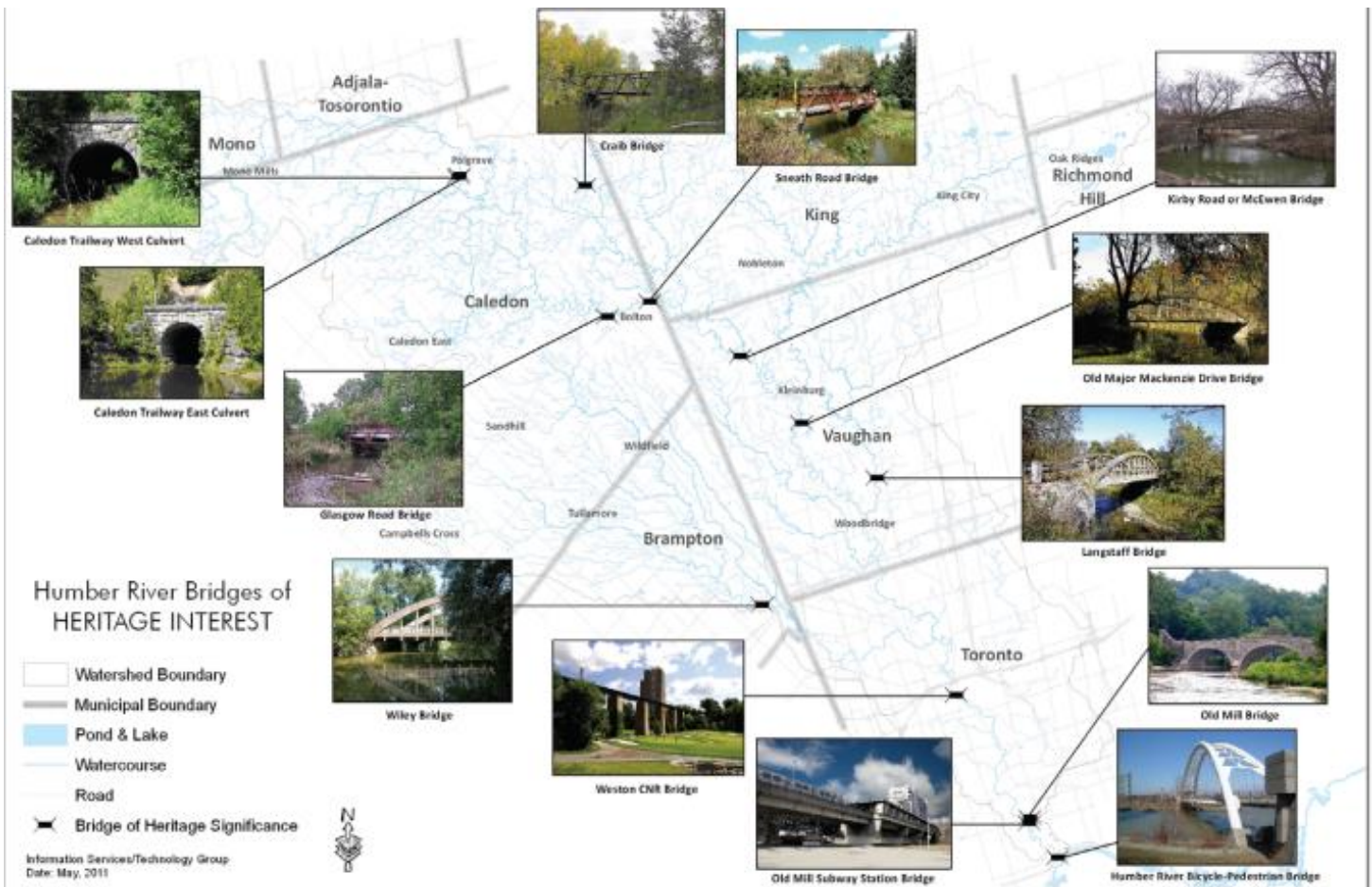


Image #4: A map which outlines all of the historical bridges found within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Woodbridge initially got its name from the numerous bridges used throughout the community to traverse the Humber River. These bridges continue to offer historical value to each community that they are a part of.

The forefront of the history of the High Line focuses mostly on the urban which lead to the integration of natural space and art within the High Line following closely behind. However, with the Humber River trail and my own walks, the primary focus is to bring natural space to the forefront of the discussion and therefore use the history of the urban landscape of Woodbridge as a supplementary, yet still highly significant, resource.

In addition to the significance surrounding the High Line in relation to my guided walks, there are also other significant walking projects that share the importance of history as well as storytelling to allow for critical reflection to occur when investigating a particular place.

One of the larger scale walking projects overseas comes from the investigation surrounding the perception of walking within an urban environment conducted by Belgian artist Francis Alÿs. Born in Belgium in 1959, Alÿs has been known to be a tremendously influential force in regards to the exploration of spaces through both walking and various artistic practices. One of Alÿs' most significant walking practices was developed in 2005 in conjunction with his collaborator Rafael Ortega as part of their exhibition *Seven Walks*, London, 2004-05. There were several smaller walking projects that took place within *Seven Walks* but what I am most interested in dissecting in relation to my own personal walking project is the reasoning and drive in which Alÿs had in using walking as an artistic medium.

Speaking on the use of walking as an effective medium, Alÿs writes: "What I try to do really is to spread stories, to generate situations that can provoke through their experience a sudden unexpected distancing from the immediate situation and can shake up your assumptions about the way things are, that can destabilize and open up for just and instant—in a flash—a different vision of the situation, as if from the inside" (Pinder 672). Similar to the way in which Alÿs views storytelling as a significant point to walking, my guided walks use history of a place as well as personal experiences as forms of storytelling to better engage with a landscape. For example, one key element to my guided walks is to engage participants within green space to provide them with a deeper understanding surrounding the significance of human perception within today's technologically driven mobile society. In doing so, I incorporated a place-based popular education approach to my guided walks. Place-based educational activities such as slow-

looking, close-listening, and nature journaling, coupled with a critical discussion of the history of the town of Woodbridge and the Humber River trail allowed for a better narrative to arise in regards to how individuals interact with green space within an urban setting on a daily basis. History plays a key role in the relationship between storytelling and walking. For my own walks, the critical discussion and the acknowledgement that the area of land Woodbridge sits on was Indigenous land prior to settlement helps strengthen the need to walk in order to better understand this narrative along with the development of the three sensory activities to better promote perception of place (Woodbridge Heritage Conservation District Study and Plan 29).

In addition to Alÿs' work surrounding the integration of storytelling within the realm of walking, Alÿs also touched upon the idea of using walking as an art form in itself; similar to the way in which my personal guided walks incorporate the use of sensory activities. As seen in the few walking projects conducted by Alÿs that will be talked about in a brief moment, Alÿs' interests lie in how specific stories can affect certain places. Most often, Alÿs uses the term *paseo* for his walks which roughly refers to a fable or the story of a journey (Pinder 681-682). Alÿs is most interested in inserting specific narratives or stories into places, and putting ideas into motion as well as affecting those places in a temporally and spatially specific way without adding to them physically (Pinder 682). According to author David Pinder, "Alÿs' first impulse was not to add to the city, but more to absorb what already was there, to work with the residues, or with the negative spaces, the holes, the spaces in between. He [Alÿs] describes it as a "let it be situation, just passing through." The main idea here was to affect the situation in the most minimal way" (Pinder 682). Where my walks incorporate the use of cameras, sketches, and the intermittent use of our senses, in many of his works Alÿs passes through a particular landscape but does not attempt to alter its form in any way. What I accomplished with my own walks in

relation to Alÿs' works was the attempt to draw out and highlight the perceptions of a specific landscape using the slow-looking, close-listening, and nature journaling techniques. Similarly to Alÿs, these three sensory activities leave no lasting imprint on the landscape physically; however, such activities can help bring to the forefront the spatial/sensory awareness of a landscape as well how we view a particular place temporally.

The temporal aspect of my walks comes in the form of critically discussing the history that has helped shape Woodbridge and the Humber River trail. In addition, the dissection of Indigenous history adds another layer within investigating the temporal scale of my chosen landscape. As well, the slow-looking exercise utilizes a camera or recording device to capture a still image of the landscape that is being investigated. Again, this allows for the landscape to remain relatively untouched in the physical sense and also promotes the idea of empathy for our environment through the idea of "look but do not touch." Lastly, close-listening utilizes sounds to create a map of the surrounding landscape, and nature journaling offers a creative outlet for participants to express their perceptions of the Humber River trail through words, sketches or other means. In all, as will be seen when summarizing Alÿs' walking work shortly, my own guided walks are focused on the idea of allowing participants to "absorb" the landscape around them through sight, sounds, and words without disturbing the natural green space.

Francis Alÿs' works and his overall goal to "absorb" a particular place rather than alter in physically come in many forms. Some early examples included a walk entitled *The Collector* (1990-92) in which Alÿs walked the streets of Mexico City pulling a small magnetized metal dog that eventually became adorned with nails, coins, wires, bottle caps, and other scraps of metal (Pinder 682). As well, the walk entitled *Magnetic Shoes* (1994) similarly used this idea of gathering scraps from the streets of Havana and then having then displaying the photographic,

textual, or video evidence to the public (Pinder 682). Other walks that have been featured by Alÿs focus on leaking, unraveling, and expending. On a walk entitled *The Leak* (1995), Alÿs wandered through and exited a gallery holding a can of blue paint that had been punctured (Pinder 682). Again, in 1995 and 1998 Alÿs walked amongst the streets of Mexico City and Stockholm. In this walk labeled *Fairy Tales*, Alÿs wore a blue sweater that slowly unraveled leaving a delicate thread throughout the streets for the public to follow (Pinder 682). In his walks, Alÿs absorbs the aura of a particular place rather than alter its physicality. Although Alÿs is a contemporary artists working within an art system, the ecological ethics of not changing a place physically is a key principle to my walks and the way in which my guided walks are conducted. Since the goal of my walks is to allow participants to experience the Humber River trail and develop their own perceptions of such an experience, it is important to have members of my guided walks fully committed and immersed in the experienced. As such, this is the main reasoning behind adopting sensory based activities to allow for individuals to perceive the trail as they view it in real time. One of the most efficient ways in capturing a participant's perception and experiences while walking through the trail is through sight. By documenting each individual's experience through the capturing of images via a camera, this allows for a less invasive walk to take place. In all, the importance of sensory activities in both my own work as well as Alÿs' become more apparent when attempting to understand a particular landscape not just in its physical form, but attempting to understand the context of place in relation to human existence and our own individual roles within the larger world.

In regards to the importance of walking as an art practice, it is important to note the intricate relationship that can arise between the body and a specific landscape when walking is involved. To further explain this relationship, a brief history of walking must be discussed. The

most notable changes to walking came in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As stated by Edensor, “With the advent of cheap, reliable travel in the 18th and 19th centuries, which opened up a variety of accessible destinations, and a regularized working week with apportioned leisure time, the development of walking as a popular pursuit generated a set of ideological and aesthetic notions” (Edensor 83). The act of walking provided a unique contrast to these new, speedier forms of travel which ultimately heightened the awareness of the distinct sensibilities and perceptions it facilitated (Edensor 83). This awareness is what led to the cultivation of reflexive thinking that occurred on walks during the Romantic era which paved the way for the production of a distinct relationship between the walking body and nature (Edensor 83). This development of both ideological and aesthetic notions are what will be brought to the forefront when discussing the next few walking projects in relation to my own guided walks.

One significant point that Edensor raises when speaking on the relationship between walking and reflexive thinking, is the idea that the act of walking can also act as a catalyst for self-transformation. Edensor writes, “Reflexivity is enmeshed within evolving formations of the modern self, notably in response to the unnerving development of an industrial and urban economy. Thus walking becomes bound up with notions of individuality and self-development, with a retreat from the city and the urban self, and towards a freeing of the body, a rediscovery of childish sensation, and aesthetic and moral regeneration” (Edensor 84). I highlight several walking projects further on but for now I would like to raise several points of similarity regarding what Edensor is stating in terms of my walks. Like Edensor, my walks serve several purposes: to be able to showcase the ability for aura of a place to be strengthened through the senses, and to offer an opportunity for participants to critically engage with the environment in a much more intimate way than simply passing through it. My guided walks through the Humber

River trail highlight the ability of walking to become a reflexive activity and allow participants to engage in a dialogue with their inner consciousness and the environment around them. What is also common between Edensor's finding and my own guided walks is the ability for walking to free the human body of the constraints of the modern world. Too often are we focused on what is in front of us, we do not have the opportunity or freedom to simply look around. In addition, Edensor also addresses the urban-rural dichotomy that is evident when walking through two different landscapes.

In terms of my own walks, I suggest that the Humber River trail can be viewed as neither an urban nor a rural space. Instead, the trail lends itself to having the unique quality of exhibiting signs of an active integration of both landscapes. Every portion of the trail varies drastically from the part that precedes it. On one hand, the Humber River trail transforms into a heavily secluded pine forest that is dense enough to prevent some sounds from penetrating the rows of trees. On the other hand there are sections of the trail, which become flooded with urban noise of thousands of commuters passing over the Major Mackenzie Bridge each day. Although the Humber River trail differs slightly from the urban-rural dichotomy that Edensor addresses, there are still some excellent points in terms of walking that can be taken away. Edensor writes, "The urban-rural dichotomy is sustained by ideas about the value of walking in the country, which assert the beauty, freedom, social and natural order of the rural by contrast with the urban" (Edensor 84-85). Edensor goes on to state that the urban is constantly seen as constricting as outlined by the excerpt taken from the current pamphlet advertising the Ramblers Association: "...living means being free to roam, to step out, without pointless restrictions, free as the wind, through the woods and over the common... There is something missing in everyday urban life. Out beyond lies the open countryside—a reality of freedom unknown to many" (Edensor 85).

The act of walking through the Humber River trail and the inclusion of the three sensory activities allows for participants to briefly become free of the busyness that an urban community forces onto them. In this sense, my guided walks provide a temporary form of escapism for participants and that my only hope for all individuals involved is that they carry on each day exploring new environments and not become restricted by the confines of an urban community.

When investigating the relationship between walking and our bodies, it is best to look at the works completed by sculptor Richard Long. In response to most of Long's walking projects, Edensor writes, "These works are a rebuke to the normative, linear determination of much walking, and yet they also smack of the impossible desire to fully know the spaces moved through. There is also the desire to measure, to quantify, in Long's work, and yet the measurements he employs are far removed from those used in guidebooks" (Edensor 103). In particular, Long is interested in tracing the body's path through nature, noticing the actions it takes and also the traces it makes. In comparison with my own walks through the Humber River trail, my walks act in a similar manner to Long's. For example, in a work entitled *A Moved Line in Japan* (1983), Long describes a particular sequence of events in which he picks up, carries and places 'one thing next to another' during a 35 mile walk at the edge of the Pacific Ocean (Edensor 103). One section of the sequence states:

Seaweed to Pebble
 Pebble to Dog's skeleton
 Dog's skeleton to Stick
 Stick to Mermaid's purse
 Mermaid's purse to Bamboo

Overall, Edensor writes that this sequence reveals a focusing in of human perception on particular objects and the subsequent actions that involve their removal. Although such traces

may never be evident, these changes in the scene identify a body, which acts within, improvises, and is part of nature (Edensor 103). Another significant piece of work done by Long entitled *Sound Line: A Walk of 622 Miles in 21 Days from the North Coast to the South Coast of Spain* (1990) utilizes the sense of hearing to depict a landscape. Edensor notes that the use of highlighting the auditory sense in Long's work emphasizes the beauty of the sounds of words, as in place-names. In one specific sequence Long writes: "A BRAYING DONKEY NEAR SEGURILLA, is followed by KICKING A STONE IN ALCAUDETE DE LA JARA, which is followed by HISSING WIND THROUGH BRANCHES IN LA NAVA DE RICOMALILLO" (Edensor 104-105). In this sense, Long is using sounds that are heard along the walk to distinguish place names. Ultimately this allows for such landscapes to become distinguishable simply based on sounds.

Both works completed by Long present a similar outcome to those results found by walking through the Humber River trail. Although the Humber River trail was not physically altered in any way as was seen in *A Moved Line in Japan*, the visual aspect of my walks acted in such a way that they allowed participants to capture images along the trail without leaving a trace of human intervention behind. In a much more apparent similarity, both my walks and Long's walk along the coast of Spain utilized sound to strengthen the relationship between the body and the landscape being observed.

In conclusion, my Humber River guided walks, New York City's High-Line, as well as Francis Alÿs's walking art all converge to emphasize a significant role walking plays in regards to the human perception of a specific landscape. Whether it is found to be an urban landscape within green space or a plot of natural land within an urban city center, the reflection of a place's history as well as how participants interact with these places (past, present, and future) through

storytelling practices allow for a distinct relationship to occur between humans and the act of walking.

Development and purpose of three sensory activities

The purpose of this walking project literature review was to investigate the various ways in which walking works within art practices. In essence, this literature review acted as a stepping-stone to develop appropriate activities for my guided walks.

To develop my final installation at Crossroads Gallery at York University, I collected sufficient data about the guided walk took through participant's experience. To begin, I took four preliminary walks to find suitable and appropriate routes. Two of these walks were through the Kortright Center for Conservation, and the other two walks were within the Humber River trail along the William Granger Greenway located near the intersection of Rutherford and Islington Road in Woodbridge. After these preliminary walks, I chose the Humber River trail as the main site for my guided walks. I began the recruitment process in order to gather participants to engage in exploring this trail through walking and various sensory activities. I made an invitation as a word document and handed it out to participants who are currently living in, or have lived in the Woodbridge community prior to the start of my research project. Once each participant was selected, I took the time to explain each section of the invitation with the participant to ensure their full understanding of the guidelines and requirements for the final guided walks.

The final invitation included the name of the project: *Aura and Perception: A Guided Walk*, the date, time, location, parking, transit routes and schedule of the walks, including potential rain out dates for a week later. Finally, the last portion of the invitation outlined that each participant must bring a digital camera or a mobile device; a reusable water bottle to stay hydrated and to wear weather appropriate clothing. For flexibility, participants were given the

option of two dates for two separate walks taking place: Saturday October 27th, 2018 and Sunday October 28th, 2018. In preparation for the planned activities during the walks, I purchased blank paper, pencils, colored pencils, and pens. I also purchased a hiking first aid kit.

The two guided walks started promptly at 10 am on the weekend of Saturday October 27th, 2018. Before physically walking the trails, I read a land acknowledgement to show recognition and respect to the Indigenous land on which the three-hour walk would take place. I initiated a short briefing exercise for the participants to introduce the main concepts of the guided walk. I introduced main themes such as aura, varying perception of natural space, and the difference between place and space. I shared a brief history surrounding the community of Woodbridge and the Humber River trail (William Granger Greenway) providing the participants with the opportunity to reminisce about their own stories about the community as many of the participants lived in Woodbridge. As well, I wanted this history briefing to act as a trigger for the participants to invite them to think about their past and how it has shaped their understanding and perception of natural space while participating in several activities throughout the guided walk. Finally, as part of the briefing conversation I outlined the three major sensory activities that took place along the trails. The overall goal of this initial briefing conversation was to allow participants to become acquainted with one another, as I wanted to create a safe and respectful environment for each individual to encourage discussion and foster relationships outside of this space as well.

After walking for approximately twenty minutes, at 9: 35 am the groups stopped for the formal introduction and explanation of the first activity titled “slow looking.” Slow looking uses the visual sense in which participants were asked to take a brief moment to evaluate their surroundings and then use photography as a means to convey their findings. Initially, the groups

were made to stop along the trail for ten minutes to gather their first set of photographs. After this, participants were encouraged to stop along the trail at any point during the guided walk to take pictures so long as it did not interfere with the other planned activities. Therefore, this visual exercise had no set stop aside from the initial explanation and was ongoing for the entire duration of the guided walk. Ultimately, this activity was designed for participants to capture and document moments of interest throughout the guided walk and allow for the natural aura of the trail to be captured and viewed in order to trigger memory beyond the confines of the trail. After this initial explanation and picture taking process was completed, I also explained to participants that there was no limit placed on the amount of images each individual can capture. However, it was required by each participant to send me three to five of their most meaningful photographs via email, which will then be used, along with my own personal photographs, as submitted images for my final installation.

Walking was resumed for another twenty minutes until approximately 9:50 am when the next activity was announced. The next activity for the walk was listed as “close listening.” The close listening exercise consisted of utilizing the auditory sense of each participant in contrast to the visual. This auditory activity was designed specifically with the intent to emphasize the contrast between walking within green space situated in an urban setting. Participants were asked beforehand if they were comfortable closing their eyes. Moving forward, participants were then asked to hold their eyes shut for two minutes and observe their surroundings entirely based on the sounds heard around them. When the two minutes have fully elapsed, it was then explained to participants that they recreate their surroundings via a sound map. Participants were handed two sheets of blank paper and were asked to label that paper using the directions of a compass. Then, participants attempted to draw the sounds that they heard around them and label them on

the paper in correlation with whichever direction they were facing for the duration of having their eyes closed. Initially, there was only going to be one stop for this close listening exercise which, was designated within a heavily forested area. However, upon reconsideration and walking through the trail once more by myself, I decided to include one more close-listening stop that was situated underneath a bridge the runs alongside Major Mackenzie Road. The reasoning behind this additional close listening stop was to garner a stronger response to the contrast between the perception of nature within a heavily forested space and the perception of nature surrounding a natural space situated within a much more urban setting. Ultimately, the goal of this close listening exercise was to heighten each participant's perception of their surroundings which contributed to each individual's unique sense of aura of the trail. As a conclusion to my initial preparatory walks and during the two guided walks themselves, the sounds that were heard along the trails and during the close listening exercises were recorded to offer a much more immersive experience surrounding the virtual reality aspect of my final installation.

Upon nearing the end of the trail and the entrance to the grounds of the McMichael Art Gallery, the final activity for the guided walk was explained in detail. This final activity, nature journaling, took into consideration the themes, history, and conversations brought up along the first two activities. For this exercise, I provided participants with blank sheets of paper along with pencils, pens, colored pencils, and crayons. The goal of the natural journaling process was to allow individuals to think critically and creatively when dissecting the aura of a specific place. Initially, there were several issues as a number of participants across both walking groups had difficulty in terms of what to include in their nature journals. I offered writing prompts for each group for easier flow of thoughts onto paper, including asking them to consider how each of the two prior activities made them feel about walking through the trails rather than using other

modes of transportation. In addition, I asked participants to consider whether using their other senses helped enhance or changed their perception of the green space, as well as how this impacted their overall experience with aura. Most importantly, I asked participants to consider their own personal histories surrounding living in the area of Woodbridge and their own experiences with nature growing up in a suburban landscape. This inclusion of personal history allowed for participants to better understand the concept of nature journaling in regards to developing a conversation around the aura of the Humber River trail. Once these writing prompts were addressed, participants had the opportunity to write or sketch their own narratives of the Humber River trail while incorporating their own perceptions of the walk as a whole as well as the overall process that was taken to enhance their perception of a natural space through the act of walking. As a conclusion to the two walks that took place, a debriefing exercise was organized at the end of each walk to offer participants a chance to share their findings and address and outstanding questions surrounding the themes of the planned activities.

Results

The act of walking through the Humber River trail offered participants an opportunity to explore unfamiliar landscape in new ways. By incorporating the use of sensory exercises in my two walks, a better relationship between the trail and the individual's walking was established. These walks gave participants the opportunity to "walk" through and consider the history of Woodbridge as well as incorporate their own personal relationships with nature into their own narratives surrounding the Humber River trail. In all, participants had a positive response to the walks.

During the first portion of the walk itself I was able to discuss with the participants the overall themes of the walk as well as the history of the Humber River trail and the Woodbridge

community. What surprised me the most during this initial briefing was how quickly the concept of aura was grasped. There were minimal questions asked during our discussion of aura. Another significant result that occurred during the first portion of my walks was the eagerness of participants to share their own personal histories involving the Humber River trail. One such participant noted that the Humber River trail was a place that had a very special meaning to them. This participant shared with the group that they had hiked/walked this trail numerous times throughout the years and was unaware just how far back in history the story of the Woodbridge community stretched. Another participant chimed in before we started walking and stated that they had always passed by the trail while driving but never bothered to stop and walk the trail. This point that was brought up by this participant really pleased me because it was one of the major points that validated this research project. One of the main reasons I chose to investigate landscapes through walking is that, through walking, participants can gain a deeper understanding of their own personal relationships with nature. Car-culture has dominated society for the past century. This car-oriented society has become less reliant on visual observations regarding the world around them and simply chooses to only visualize the start of a journey and the end. What inspired me the most for this project was the investigation of “what happens in between Point A and Point B?” When travelling, we already know our starting point and where we plan on ending up, but what occurs between Point A and Point B that can help shape our identities and, in the case of my project, bring us to better appreciate natural elements of our Earth. Looking back at the results of this walk in relation to this participant, I was glad that they shared their point with the group as it allowed me to observe the joy, wonder, and compassion experienced by this individual as we walked the trails leading up to the McMichael Art Gallery.

Proceeding through each scheduled sensory activity proved to be a relatively smooth process with no negative feedback or misunderstanding pertaining to what was required of each participant. Each activity proceeded as planned within the allotted time frame outlined prior to the start of the walks and allowed for fourteen unique pieces of art produced by the participants. One portion of the walk that was adjusted slightly was the close-listening activity. The first portion of the close-listening exercise took place approximately a quarter ways through the trail within a dense area that consisted mostly of pine trees. I chose this area for the close-listening exercise because this was far enough into the trail that the sound of cars was less and almost not audible. Another close-listening exercise was developed to further explore the dichotomy between natural and an urban space. This involved standing underneath a concrete bridge that runs along Major Mackenzie Road. The idea to include a second auditory exercise within my walks occurred during the first walk. The goal was to emphasize that the Humber River trail was not only a prominent green-space within the Woodbridge community, but also a significant green-space that is integrated within an urban landscape as well. By allowing for a second close-listening activity to take place, I wanted to see if the perception of the Humber River trail had shifted in the eyes and ears of each participant. With my results from these two close-listening activities I firmly believe that I achieved what I initially set out to accomplish. This can best be seen in **Figure #1** and **Figure #2**.

Both images pictured below depict the drastic changes in environment that myself and participants encountered throughout the walk. **Figure #1** details the results of the first close-listening exercise that was done in the more secluded section of the Humber River trail within the rows of pine trees. In this image, it can be seen that the participant chose to highlight the various sounds of nature that were prominent in this section of the walk. Because the rows of

pine trees provided an element of seclusion, it was very easy to recognize the more natural sounds of the landscape rather than the auditory cues that designate an urban community. After speaking with the participants during our discussion period, they mentioned to me that the reason why they elected to limit the detail for this specific sound map was to place emphasis on the fact that this portion of the trail was really secluded and removed from an urban environment.

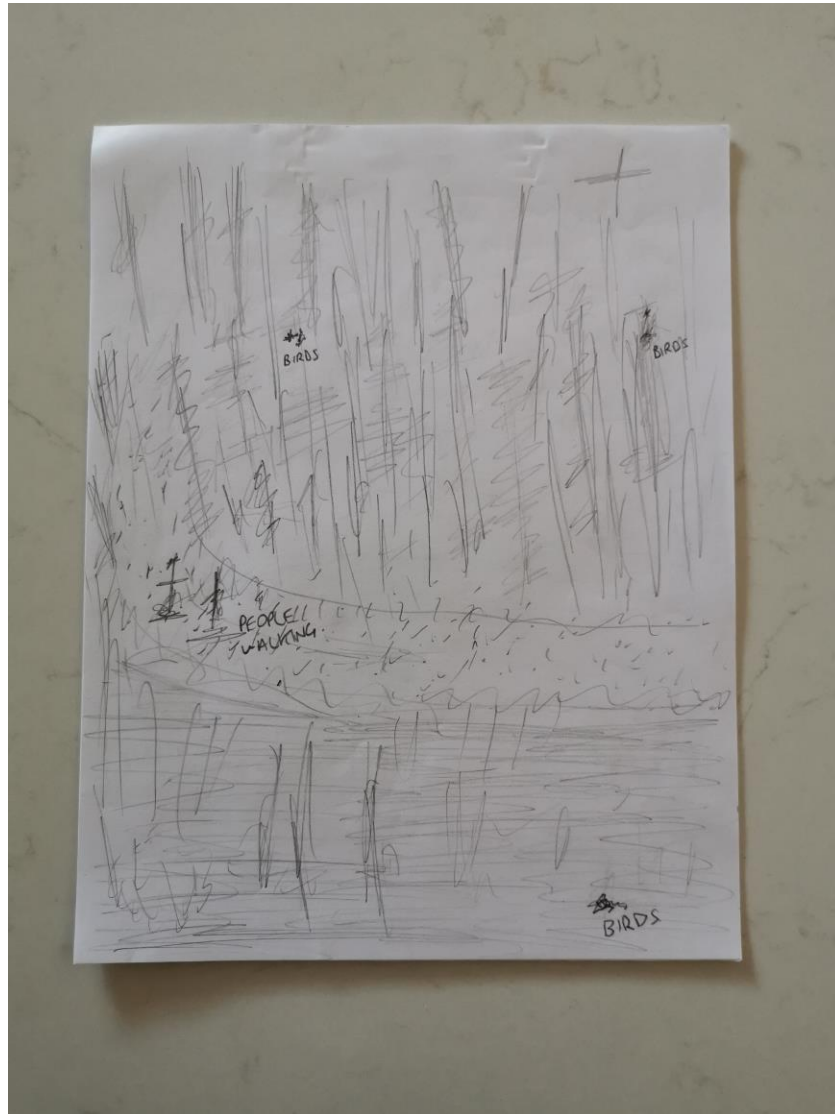


Figure #1: Outcome of the first close-listening exercise that took place near a pine forest along the Humber River trail.

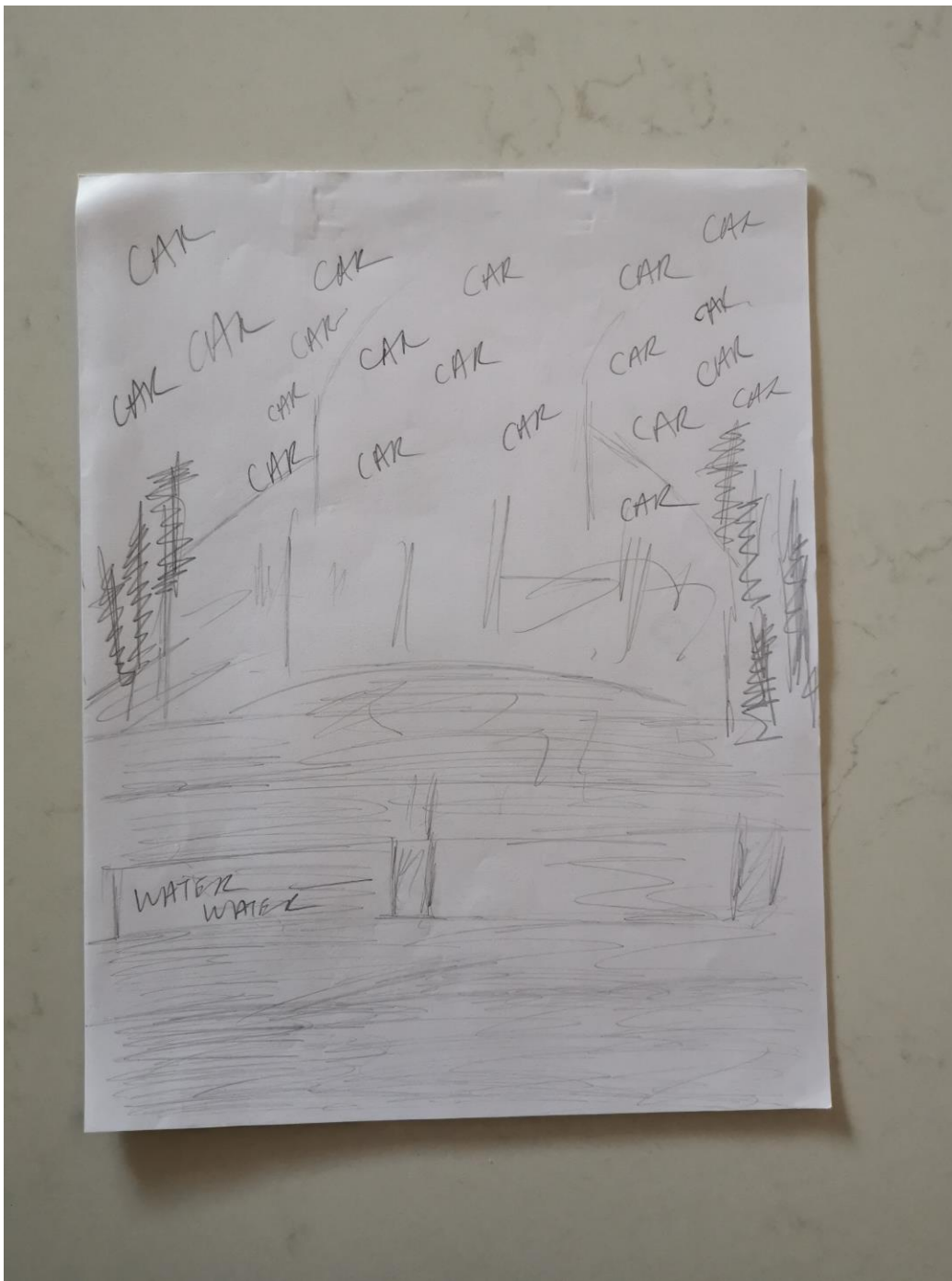


Figure #2: Outcome of the second close-listening exercise which took place underneath a bridge that runs alongside Major Mackenzie Road in Woodbridge.

In contrast, looking at **Figure #3**, this participant walked through the trail with the rest of the group during which it began to rain slightly. The participant was able to provide a much more detailed sound map with the inclusion of a change in weather. Although this change in weather was slight, it elicited enough of a response for this participant to change their perception of such a secluded portion of the trail into one that was able to provide soothing natural acoustics.

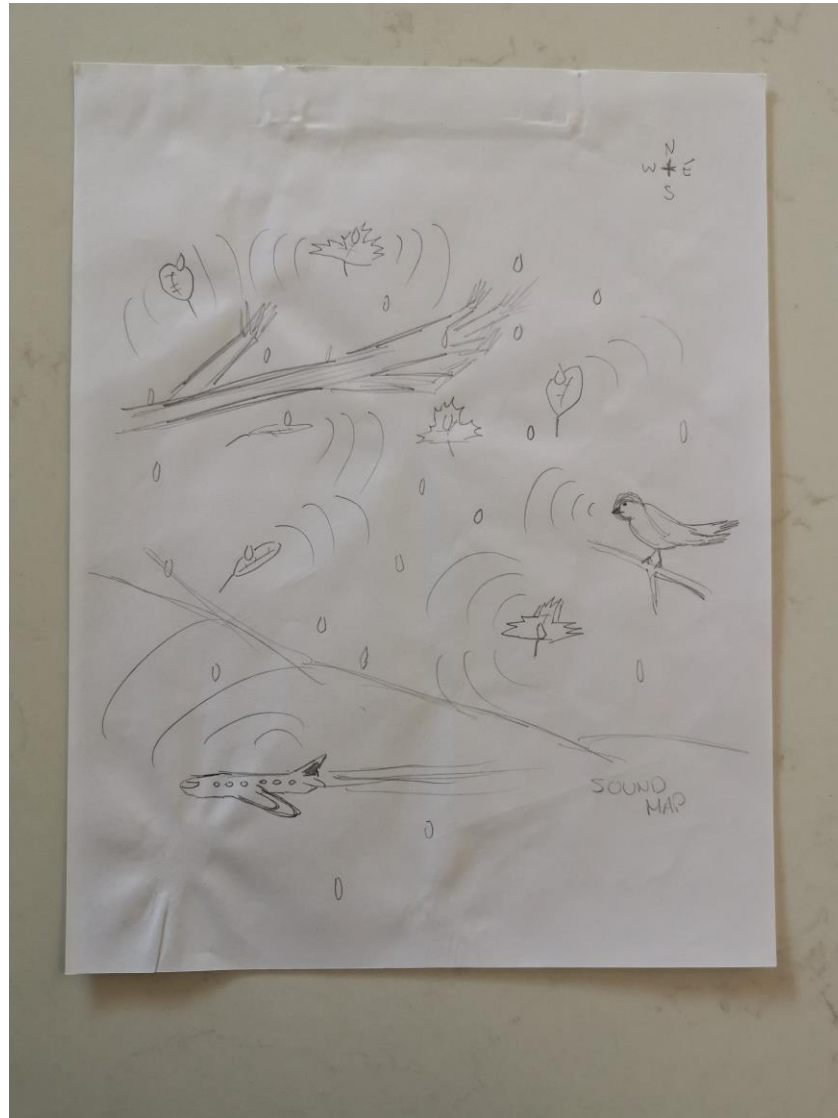


Figure #3: Outcome of another close-listening exercise which was completed by the pine forest within the Humber River trail.

Looking back to the sound map featured in **Figure #2**, this was done by the same participant featured in **Figure #1** and is a direct result of the second close-listening exercise which was completed underneath the bridge on Major Mackenzie Road. The results of both of these close-listening exercises surprised me in what I received as a response by the participant. First, as observed in **Figure #2**, this participant was able to include much more detail in their sound map when exposed to urban sounds. What was most interesting though was the decision to depict both sound maps entirely in grey scale. As I was explaining the close-listening exercise I was sure to mention to the participants that they were free to go ahead and use pencils to create their sound maps or, if they choose, to use colored pencils instead. At first, between the two walking groups, I noticed that there was a decent split between participants who chose to create their sound maps in grey scale, and those who chose to add color to their depictions. When it came to the discussion period at the closing of the second close-listening exercise one participant explained that to only rely on sound to map their surroundings, they conveyed the lack of visual perception by depicting the landscape without color. The results of my discussion with this participant were unique in that it offered a new mode of interpretation of Humber River trail with the use of visual and auditory senses. The participant's decision to exclude color in their depiction of the Humber River trail shows how drastic the perception of an object/landscape can vary depending on the individual that is observing it.

In terms of observing the landscape that makes up the Humber River trail, the visual sense of sight was the most significant in regards to the themes presented throughout my research. More specifically, the sense of sight plays an integral role in understanding aura when considering how an individual perceives a specific place. One of the main goals of my research was to investigate how the aura of a particular place can be elevated through the use of images.

While preparing for the guided walks, I took a personal interest and passion in learning the art of photography as a mode of visual storytelling. In their work, Magali Peyrefitte emphasizes the use of the visual sense as a mode of storytelling and constructing narratives. Peyrefitte states, “The photographs are a visual expression that like the conversation in situ are emplaced in time and space” (Peyrefitte 2). Although photography emphasizes the visual, each image has a motivation for being captured, and with this inspiration a potential story can emerge. Narratives can convey and relate simultaneously physical space and one’s experience Peyrefitte explains, “Each narrative is different but they all present a reflection on the physicality of place: for instance the streets, the playgrounds and the terraced houses. This reflection is revealing of their perceptions but also of their experience of place” (Peyrefitte 2). People tell stories through photographs. Therefore, if two participants were to take a photograph of, or sketch the same scenery during the guided walks, each participant’s relationship and overall narrative surrounding that visual piece of work will be different from one another and be able to stand on its own.

Throughout the walks, participants were encouraged to take part in an exercise known as slow-looking. This visual exercise allowed for participants to detach themselves from the average active lifestyle of a now car-oriented society. Slow-looking requires participants to navigate the landscape with the eyes rather than their bodies. This method of navigating the Humber River trail supplements Walter Benjamin’s idea of aura in relation to my project by having participants connect on a deeper emotional level to the world around them. Using their mobile device or cameras, the first walk yielded several interesting results. As seen in **Figure #4** this picture depicts the point in which the group was surrounded by pine trees prior to the start of the first close-listening exercise. As stated by this participant, “I took this shot after learning

about aura and experiencing it with the ambient rain drops and coniferous foliage. Watching these beautiful water drops was very peaceful and hearing them all around me was extraordinary.” This piece of photography is significant in that it highlighted the overall relationship between senses, aura, and the capturing of images.



Figure #4: A picture taken by a participant during the slow-looking exercise which depicts the after effects of rain during the first walk.

The goal of this exercise was to achieve harmony between all three exercises and seek out the results necessary to conclude that multiple senses have a direct effect on how an individual perceives a landscape; and in turn, allow individuals to capture the aura of a place to commit that feeling to memory. Once the aura of a place is committed to memory through the vector of various senses, pictures such as those taken throughout my walks can act as triggers to help individual access specific memories. In the cases of this first participant, they were feeling at peace by hearing the rain hitting leaves. When asked during the debriefing exercise at the end

of the walk, this participant shared that their most memorable part of the walk was this sound of the rain and will associate this sound in their memory, which helps strengthen the relationship of their sense and aura of this place.

The last activity that took place during my walks along the Humber River trail also yielded really positive results. Nature Journaling invited participants to express their own personal perceptions of what the trail offered to them as well. As a primary example, one participant noted: “There is a greater sense of tranquility while walking deeper into the forest. The flow and sounds of the river, birds chirping, and snow covered trees makes you feel a part of nature. The sound of cars and trucks disrupts your positive thoughts and heightens anxiety. The trails of Woodbridge continue to offer refuge from an otherwise noisy, stressful, and fast paced environment that we live with daily.” This journal entry highlights how participants recognize the immediate dichotomy between the urban and natural space. As well, this participant recognized what role this dichotomy played in their perception of the Humber River trail. As noted, they expressed uneasiness and anxiousness during the close-listening exercise that combined urban and natural space. In addition, this participant explained in detail the way this shift from natural space to urban landscape affected their thought processes in terms of moving from a peaceful state of mind to a more disturbed state of mind.

Finally, another journal entry that emphasizes the effectiveness of perception and the idea that walking within nature has the capacity to provide a sense of freedom can be seen in the following example. This participant writes: “During the walk I experienced a time away from urban life. A continuous trail with endless trees and life is a completely different setting from the usual mapped and paved landscaped we are used to seeing. This almost makes time non-existent because of the freedom we have to go at our own pace when compared to taking regular

transportation where we require constant estimates of travel time.” This shared experience references the sense of freedom that natural spaces can provide and brings everything full circle by addressing the quote by Rebecca Solnit at the start of this paper: “Freedom to walk is not much use without someplace to go” (Solnit 249). The way this participant talks about the freedom they experienced when walking through the Humber River trail is also extremely significant in regards to how I structured the overall walks. I structured the walks in a way that invited participants to explore the landscape in as much detail as possible while still being able to keep a schedule. However, when reading through this particular journal entry I realized that imposing a strict timeline for the walk severely limited the freedom for participants to explore. Although this did not alter the results of the walks drastically, the idea that time can also affect the perception of a particular landscape should also be considered in future examinations of this topic.

Experience gained from walking within nature

In terms of walking through a portion of green space that is intertwined with an urban habitat, there were several interesting and important elements of discussion which arose during the duration of my guided walk. I approached my research surrounding this topic very personally due to my extensive experience as an Environmental Studies student and because of the way I was brought up while living in the community of Woodbridge. Growing up, my parents enrolled my sister and I in a nature summer camp program at the Kortright Center for Conservation. From my experiences with this summer camp program, I garnered compassion for green space and the overall recognition for the need to protect such green space; especially those situated within highly urbanized communities. Most important to this research was inviting participants to express their compassion for green spaces as I did while attending the Kortright Center for

Conservation summer program. What surprised me most when outlining this particular outcome for my project was the link between Walter Benjamin's aura in relation to perception and memory. According to Solnit, "Memory, like the mind and time, is unimaginable without physical dimensions; to imagine it as a physical place is to make it into a landscape in which its contents are located, and what has a location can be approached" (Solnit 77). In this sense, memories (as well as the aura of a place), can act as a real space and through the act of remembering, we can navigate or "walk" through specific lived experiences.

From my walk and sensory activities, I created opportunities to add to the lived experiences for each participant. When asked about my guided walks along the Humber River trail, each participant had the opportunity to offer a new story or perspective regarding their time with me through the trail. Each participant holds a different memory of the trail and what is significant is how this memory of this green space has the ability to shape their way of thinking in terms of navigating future landscapes as well as the maps of their minds and bodies. Walking has the innate ability to teach compassion by allowing us to see how our actions affect the world around us. What was interesting when this was applied to my guided walks was how well versed many of the participants were in terms of caring for, and maintaining the community green spaces. It was both surprising and fulfilling too see that participants were willing to bring their own re-usable water bottles instead of plastic disposable and when taking pictures for the slow looking exercise, participants were keen to abide by the trail markers and not overstep the boundaries which may harmfully impact the ongoing natural process in the area. This was ultimately done through the use of walking as well as the three activities previously mentioned: slow looking, close listening, and nature journaling. Walking was chosen as the primary mode of

exploring the trail because of the accessibility to features of the environment, which are not normally made available through other means of transportation such as driving.

Walking offers a chance to close the gap between ourselves and a particular environment through compassion and exploration by physically slowing down one's mind in conjunction with slowing down one's body. Using these slow approaches to exploration proved to be extremely significant in understanding the rich history of the community surrounding the Humber River trail as well as the impact that walking through a particular green space can have on our bodies and minds.

One of the immediate goals of my research was to be able to have the body and mind work together through heightening sensory sensitivity to enrich the impression of a place within the community of Woodbridge, which eventually leads to a lasting positive impression of green space. Rebecca Solnit states, "Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly make a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts" (Solnit 5). What struck me as significant in terms of this text from Rebecca Solnit in relation to my research is that the mind and body cannot be thought of as two separate entities when exploring a particular place. Instead both entities are interwoven with each other and both the mind and body assist one another in developing a deeper connection and aspects of critical thinking when navigating the history and characteristics of a place. In stating this, one of the highlighted aspects of my final guided walks through the Humber River trail outlined the need to bridge the gap between mind and body using aspects of the senses. Another significant way of thinking that surprised me when completing my research was the way in which green space can

be compared to urban life. Initially, I aspired to develop a new way of thinking about green space that would catch the eye of participants and inspire them to explore the Humber River trail alongside myself.

In doing so, I took the concept of a natural park or trail and compared it to that of a modern art gallery. When comparing the two, much of the enjoyment stems from aesthetics. When entering a new natural space or gallery for the first time, this creates a sense of wonder through the opportunity for participants to physically escape a consumer/car-oriented culture. One participant who was particularly moved by this comparison stated, “It’s important to be able to just get away from technology every now and then. We are all so focused on moving from place to place in the quickest ways possible but sometimes we forget that if we slow down and just take a look around us we will discover the most amazing things even from miniscule details.” In all, the slow looking, close listening, and nature journaling activities acted as vectors to guide participants in terms of formulating their own perceptions and feelings of the place they were investigating.

Comparison of literature and other walking projects

The literature and other projects that were researched are interconnected in terms of my own project surrounding my guided walks and interpreting green space through various senses. To start, Rebecca Solnit’s book “Wanderlust,” influenced my thinking about walking within green space and helped me develop new narratives through walking experiences. Solnit’s work also invites new and refreshing sensory approaches to walking. With a heavy emphasis placed on urban development and common reliance on technology within society, I turn to Solnit’s critique, “Television, telephones, home computers, and the Internet complete the privatization of everyday life that suburbs began and cars enhanced. They make it less necessary to go out into

the world and thus accommodate retreat from rather than resistance to the deterioration of public space and social conditions” (Solnit 253). In comparison to my own research and guided walks, I chose the setting of my presentations as being within green space rather than separate from it to encourage the de-privatization of everyday life that comes from our advancements in technology and entertainment. I believe green space should not be recognized as something that is separate from our everyday lives, rather green space should be welcomed and publicly accessible for everyone to enjoy. Another instance why Solnit’s work was so influential on the design of my own research project was the ideology that surrounds car-culture and other faster modes of transportation. In particular, Solnit addresses the significance of trains in relation to human perception of the world. Solnit states, “The train was experienced as a projectile, and travelling on it as being shot through the landscape—thus losing control of one’s senses.....ceased to be a traveler and became a parcel” (Solnit 257). Choosing to walk through a trail within green space became a way to honor not only our own bodies and the movement they provide us with, but the natural beauty that green space provides us with as well. One of my goals with developing my guided walks was to move away from a fast paced environment that surrounds suburban culture, and instead shift towards slowing down our bodies to experience the landscape in a humanly way.

When discussing the walk itself, there are several things that worked extremely well in terms of participant interaction along with elements of the guided walks that proved challenging and pose the possibility of being altered in the future. To begin with, the trail itself and the allotted timing for each of the guided walks proved to be a big positive. The Humber River trail runs approximately 3.5 kilometers in length. I initially wanted to give enough time for participants to experience the trail and activities as well as explore the green space on their own

time. I allotted three hours from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm to walking the trail, with several intervals within that time frame solely dedicated to the slow looking, close, listening, and nature journaling activities. In all approximately an hour each was dedicated to travelling time (actually physically walking the trail), the three activities, and any discussions or questions that came up during the duration of the guided walk. A three hour time span seemed to fit this trail and the activities perfect because of the fact that the two guided walks managed to finish thirty minutes and an hour from the allotted times respectively. In the end, time management was something that I was personally concerned with and struggled with in the early stages of developing the guided walks.

As well as the time management worked during the span of my guided walks there were challenges that had to be accounted for as well. For example, as mentioned, my first walking group managed to finish the walk and final discussion period with only thirty minutes remaining. However, my second walking group managed to complete the walk itself and the final discussion period with approximately an hour to spare. This was most likely due to the level of experience in terms of walking through green space and hiking for an extended period of time. My first guided walking group had participants who were of varying degrees of walking/hiking experience. Ultimately, this allowed for the group to be more staggered during the walk which lead to a longer walking time so as to allow for several participants to catch up to the rest of the group. In contrast to this, my second walking group consisted of much more experienced trail hikers. Most of the participants in this group actively spend their spare time exploring local trails and green spaces. This difference between walking groups was extremely subtle and did not seem to cross my mind until both walks were over and I checked the remaining time. What challenged me the most in this situation regarding the faster walking group, was that we had

covered much of the material that was planned with such a large portion of time left. To remedy this occurrence next time, I would try to incorporate another significant activity to make up for the lost time. For instance, one of the activities that came to mind was a trust exercise in which participants would choose a partner and have the opportunity to get to know the landscape a little better before the walk. In this exercise one partner would close their eyes and the other participant would then lead their partner through a section of the trail. The purpose of this exercise would have been to allow for the participant with their eyes closed to become fully immersed in the landscape through using senses besides vision, as well as be able to trust their partner enough to guide them without fault. In addition, I could have also included more reflection discussion after each activity. I also sought to fill more time with my second walking group was to dive deeper into the discussion of participants' own personal history with the community of Woodbridge or this trail specifically. This was a significantly effective discussion in that it shed light on how the changing landscape can affect individuals on a personal level when green space is involved. In particular, one participant noted that when they were growing up in Woodbridge they noticed that there was much more green space surrounding the community and they found it much easier to walk from place to place. However, as time went to pass, much of the green space that was not protected by conservation areas or not managed by the city itself has shrunk or has vanished completely. This participant stated that it is a very different Woodbridge than they remembered previously and the few green spaces left within the community act as a form of escapism from a very prominent car culture and our reliance on various modes of transportation to move throughout the community.

To implement a similar project such as this one, researching the historic background of the community you are engaging with is a key factor in the success of such guided walks.

However, the success of future research projects similar to my own is not just solely reliant on historic factors. As detailed above, one thing others should be aware of before conducting and implementing a similar project is the walking experience of the participants they plan on recruiting. In my own experience with two separate guided walks, knowing the level of walking experience of a majority of the participants involved prior to the initiation of the guided walks can greatly improve time management as well as the level of in depth discussion prior to the conclusion. One possibility in terms of getting informed of the level of walking experience participants may have would be through a short survey. This survey may include questions that ask participants which trails they have walked prior to this event and how comfortable they are with changing terrain and adapting to weather conditions. In my opinion, knowing the level of walking experience of participants can help to create an even walking pace spread between the two walking groups. In this case, those participants who are more experienced walkers can stick to the front of the groups while those who are less experienced can stick closer to the back with at least one of the more experienced walkers so that they may not fall behind too much. Although another alternative to this method that one may consider when implementing similar walks would be to separate the more experienced walking participants with the less experienced walking participants to ensure each group has their needs met and can be catered too as the walking leader sees fit. Lastly, one of the most significant factors that one should take into consideration when implementing a similar project is the weather. Most importantly the safety of participants comes above all else and it the job of the walking leader to ensure that the needs of all participants are met. For example, one of the factors that I had to overcome during my first walk with my participants was that it had started to rain about half way through the walk. Although my participants were prepared for a change in weather, some participants in the future

may not take this into consideration. Personally, I took the time to check the weather the morning of the first walk and then proceeded to send reminder messages to each individual participant asking them to be prepared for a potential change in weather and to make sure to bring warm clothes in advance. Since rain was in the forecast for my first walk I had also asked each participant to consider bringing a spare set of shoes and socks if they desired as the trails that day got quite muddy and messy due to the change in weather. In all, weather is difficult to predict in terms of any planned event, but taking the necessary precautions and accounting for the needs of participants can make the walking experience much more enjoyable for all parties involved.

The Future of Walking

Moving forward with my research and the further development of my project, I hope to encourage the use of walking in everyday life. I aspire to use walking as a way to get to places that are within the vicinity rather than any other mode of transportation due to the ability of walking to bring out the aura of a particular place and the emotions attached to its history and future within the community. My hope with this research and the development of my project is to bring back the joy of walking within a suburban community through exploring its history and the natural spaces that surround it. Solnit's points out that the age of walking had peaked at the turn of the twentieth century when North Americans and Europeans would preemptively plan dates for a walk as often as they would make plans for meals or drinks (Solnit 249). In this sense, walking can be considered a sacred activity and a routine act of recreation, which ultimately led to the development of walking clubs. I would like to push myself and other individuals to continue to break the barrier that suburban communities have built around walking culture. I will continue to provide guided walks for any willing participants to embrace the sacred act of walking and the aura that comes with the particular place of interest. Over the years and through

the development of more suburban and urban communities, car culture has taken over as the main method of getting from place to place in a hurry. As stated by Solnit, “In a sense, the car has become a prosthetic, and though prosthetics are usually for injured or missing limbs, the auto-prosthetic is for a conceptually impaired body or a body impaired by the creation of a world that is no longer human in scale” (Solnit 258). In response to the concept of auto-prosthetic, I hope to create a walking club in this car-oriented suburban area. Solnit goes on to state, “The world is no longer on the scale of our bodies, but on that of our machines, and many need—or think they need—the machines to navigate that space quickly enough (Solnit 258). One of the easiest ways to detach oneself from this auto-prosthetic is to once again embrace the use of our primal sense to reconnect with the natural environment. As various modes of sensory perception were critical to the purpose of my guided walks, one of the main goals of getting participants eager to join my research project was the chance to develop/explore personal environmental and cultural narratives of the Humber River trail as well as the community of Woodbridge as a whole.

In all, I wish to continue to motivate individuals to not only walk as part of their daily routines, but to walk differently and to walk with a purpose. I hope to inspire future participants to think critically regarding the history of land and how they can embody the aura of the land through using their senses to create new environmental/cultural narratives.

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