

Walking with media: a multimodal approach

Nikos Bubaris

This paper explores the semantic space that emerges when walking and mobile media come together to create meaningful and multisensorial experiences. Drawing on social semiotics and media theory, it focuses on how walking serves an inter-modal function by binding modes (in that walking sets the common ground for different modes to be related), as well as by generating modalities (in that walking affects and shapes the ways resources are processed for making meaning). Initially, a conceptual framework for a multimodal analysis of media walking is developed, drawing on the three interrelated meta-functions of a communicative event (ideational, interactional and compositional). These functions are then extended beyond their linguistic origin and their predominantly visual references, by revisiting and introducing an array of embodied semiotic resources such as region, tempo, orientation and range. These embodied semiotic resources form how walking as a kinaesthetic practice may unfold an extended field of relations (between people, media, socio-cultural reality and the environment) that organizes the information perceived and enables the assignment of meanings in a coherent way. Subsequently, the multimodal conceptual framework is applied to two media walk projects recently presented in Athens: the multimedia walk Soundscapes/Landscapes developed by Medea Electronique and the acoustic walk Breath created by composer Dimitris Kamarotos. Emphasis is placed on how an assembly of visual, textual and aural modes unfolds sequentially and forms a 'pathway to experience' by regulating the relations between the movement, perception, response, emotions and knowledge of the walkers. It is argued that such a multimodal 'pathway to experience' constitutes a dynamic process of subjectification, as it blends body movement with ideal types of walking in our cultural imagination.

KEYWORDS

Mobile media, Media walking, Multimodality

1. Introduction: Walking with mobile media

In his seminal work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan expounds on how the wheel reorganizes the sense of time and space by acting at once as an extension and as an amputation of the foot and of physical mobility. Integral to media as different as the film projector and the car, the wheel accelerates processes and redistributes the sites of sociality, becoming one of the emblematic technologies of the mechanical age. However, the defining importance of the wheel recedes as we move deeper into the electrical age which, according to McLuhan (1994: 218), brings us back to the 'pedestrian scale'. This may sound like another peculiar McLuhanesque prognostication. However, the widespread daily use of smartphones by pedestrians in the urban space provides ample illustrations of how walking with digital mobile media creates a distinct scale of time and space perception, seamlessly combining the gradual, grounded and embodied activity of walking with the instantaneous, universal and impalpable flow of information in the wireless networks of digital telecommunications.

Beside its ordinary function as a way of human locomotion, walking is becoming progressively a practice pursued for experiential knowing and for interacting with an environment in diverse undertakings such as in outdoor leisure activities, urban planning and contemporary art. With reference to the latter, Bill Psarras (2017) notes that contemporary artists increasingly use walking in performances where various objects, materials and technologies act as semiotic references, as tools that place artists into spaces and as material manifestations of their inner world. This 'walking-with' practice, which Psarras identifies in contemporary art performances of Tim Knowles (*Windwalks*), Dominique Baron (*Black Walks*), Susan Stockwell (*Taking a Line for a Walk*) and others, can be extended to explore the various ways that walking projects bring into play mobile media to create meaningful spatial experiences in other cultural, social and political settings. All these diverse practices can be approached as varieties of media walking (Bubaris 2014). In my work on media walking, mobile media include digital mobile hardware, applications and services, but are not limited to them. Beside smartphones, web maps and location-aware systems, there is a wide range of portable objects and materials that enable, mediate, extend and transduce the relations of walkers with the environment. Indicatively, such mobile media forms may comprise the boards worn by sandwich men, the icons carried by believers in a Christian litany, the flags waved by protesters. By taking 'mobile media' to encompass a wide range of objects and technologies – past and present, low-tech and high tech – we can probe various meaningful relations that are activated as walkers engage corporeally and cognitively with communicative media in physical and discursive environments, going beyond the pinning of spatial information that renders the urban space into an individualized site of entertainment and consumption, as in the case of Foursquare and Google's 'Local Guides'.

The discussion of media walks as communicative events in the present article draws its conceptual and methodological framework from multimodal analysis. Multimodality sprung from the post-linguistic turn in social semiotics emphasizing that meaning is produced as people interact with various cultural resources in specific contexts (Kress 2010; van Leeuwen 2005). The term 'mode' concerns the consistent forms of the resources that a society uses and shares for making meaning. For example, if resources include colours, sounds, materials, bodies and symbols such as numbers and letters, some of their corresponding modes could be images, music, buildings, gestures, computation and texts. Resources and modes are not passive; their distinctive material affordances play a decisive role in the subsequent formation of meaning. The ways of sensing, processing and experiencing modes to make meaning are called 'modalities'. For example, the way a hand (i.e. resource) waves (i.e. mode) makes the meaningful gesture of a greeting (i.e. modality).

In social semiotics, all communications are considered to be multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Moreover, in a multimodal ensemble, meanings are produced by the interplay between modes rather than by the distinctive properties of assorted modes (Lyons 2016: 276). In this sense, multimodal analysis intertwines ongoing dynamics processes with lasting socio-cultural forms, the agency of the material with the motivation and the intentions of the people. This systematic but non-fixed binding over time of an 'in itself' rationale with an 'in relation to' orientation is one of the methodological strengths of multimodal analysis.

The aim of this article is to explore the semantic space that emerges when walking and mobile media come together to create multisensorial experiences that invite us to make sense of our changing position in the environment. In the first part of the article, I propose an approach to multimodal analysis that is structured around three interrelated meta-functions of a communicative event, namely representational, interactional and compositional (Kress & van Leeuwen [1996]2006), while elaborating them with a shift toward a more kinesthetic orientation. In the second part of the article, multimodal analysis is applied to two media walk projects from Athens: the multimedia walk *Soundscapes/Landscapes* developed by art group Medea Electronique and the acoustic walk *Breath* created by the composer Dimitris Kamarotos. The analysis demonstrates how an assembly of visual, textual and aural modes unfolds sequentially and forms 'pathways of experience' for the walkers, orchestrating the relations of their movement, perception, response, emotions and knowledge.

2. Walking and Multimodality

In the first pages of *Introducing Social Semiotics*, Theo van Leeuwen (2005: 4) briefly uses walking as an apt example to illustrate that the range of semiotic resources extend well beyond speech, writing and picture making and that their signifying potential includes not only socially

available meanings, but also meanings that are latent and not yet recognizable. In the rest of van Leeuwen's insightful book, however, there are no elaborations of the distinctive semiotic properties of walking. This is in keeping with the rest of the social semiotics literature, where walking is always evoked only briefly for its power as an example of the merits of multimodal analysis. This literally and semantically parenthetical attention to walking contrasts with the extensive analysis of other modes of embodied action, such as gestures performed by people usually sitting or standing still. It would seem that multimodal research shares and perpetuates a common belief in the modern western culture, that meaning-making is better analyzed in sedentarism and, as Mondada (2014) reminds us, is located in the upper parts of the body.

Or perhaps, walking is hardly ever examined as a semiotic resource, because it does not correspond directly to some mode of communication. Rather, walking is primarily a practice of relating multiple modes in various ways. Walking serves an inter-modal function by *synthesizing modes* and by *generating modalities*. *Synthesizing modes* involves setting the common ground for different modes to be connected; walking juxtaposes and attunes visual, aural, textual, material, corporeal, technological and other modes, forming the walking space as a multimodal ensemble. *Generating modalities*, involves affecting and shaping the ways resources are processed for making meaning. Meaning while walking does not arise through the connection of static entities, as in a gesture of pointing at a distant object, but through the continuous change in the relative positions and connections between the walker and the elements of the environment. Thus, a research focus on walking as a distinctive mode of body movement in the physical as well as the semantic space can contribute significant insights on the importance of relationality and mobility in multimodal analyses.

The focus here is on media walking, that is on walking that both affects and is affected by the content and the form of spatial information presented through mobile media, in the course of organizing the relation between the walkers and the environment in potentially meaningful ways. The multimodal analysis that follows is structured around the three interrelated meta-functions of a communicative event: *representational*, *interactional* and *compositional*. These meta-functions derive from a conceptual framework first proposed by Michael Halliday (1978), who used the terms ideational, interpersonal and textual respectively, as he was concerned with linguistic communication. It was adapted to the analysis of visual communication by Kress & van Leeuwen ([1996]2006), who introduced the terms adopted above. Subsequently, it has been elaborated and applied to multimodal analyses in diverse fields, e.g. moving images (Burn 2013), gestures (Martinec 2000), hypertexts and websites (Lemke 2002; Adami 2014), 3D exhibition spaces (Stenglin 2009). I extend this line of analysis further to the case of media walking by examining how walking, as an intermodal practice, fulfils these three communicative functions:

- the *representational* function: how walking becomes a meaningful practice expressing aspects of socio-cultural reality;

- the *interactional* function: how walking unfolds an extended field of relations between people, media and the environment;
- finally, the *compositional* function: how walking organizes the above relations and enables the assignment of meanings in a coherent way.

The use of the communicative functions of multimodal analysis provides a valuable conceptual toolkit for studying media walking practices. However, there are distinctive features of media walking, such as the prominence of body movement, the active role of the environment, the operational pervasiveness of the mobile media. Such features compel us to turn our attention to practices that fall outside what can be captured by methods and concepts of multimodal analysis established with reference to the text and the image (Leander & Vasudevan 2009), leading to a necessary conceptual and methodological shift. The relation of movement to meaning is a case at point: the classic multimodal approach and vocabulary (e.g. the term 'transduction') focuses on how the 'same' meaning is modified as it travels across different semiotic modes; in contrast, an analysis of media walking traces how movement across different semiotic modes or assemblages of modes creates new sequences of meanings and multiple layers of simultaneously present meanings.

At this point, some readers may question the methodological and conceptual consistency of this study. How could we research the relational and mobile features of an embodied action while drawing on a methodological framework originating in linguistics? How can we capture the kinesthetic and multisensorial features of walking with conceptual tools derived from visual communication? It is commonplace for contemporary cultural theory to admonish the predominance of language and vision in modern thinking about perception, interpretation and expression, which produced a rather static, distant and disembodied account of the human experience. Such admonitions mark a welcome and justified theoretical turn to more open and dynamic processes of knowing based on the senses, the body and human action. However, this rationale is often extended unnecessarily to a wholesale view of textual and visual communication as abstract, static and disembodied, failing to take into account multiple communicative functions in different contexts and their changes over time. For example, appreciating the perspective of a static image by focusing on the vanishing point from a distance is a modality of visual culture completely different from the experience of scanning space for visual cues for navigation on a 2D surface or in a 3D space. Similarly, texts are not only read, but acted upon; we do things with them (Adami 2015; O'Neil 2008). In this sense, a more multidimensional conceptualization of communicative events needs to be inclusive, rather than exclusive of different representational, affective and material aspects of the sensorial modalities. Following and extending this line of thought, we can now turn to applying the three communicative metafunctions to media walking, approaching it as an inter-modal practice of organizing semiotic resources towards meaningful experiences.

2.1 *The representational function*

The representational function refers to the shared ways members of a socio-cultural group connect modalities with conceptions, discourses, needs and expectations to construe events and actions in which they engage. During a game, for instance, teammates choose to exchange gestural (and not linguistic) modalities in order to develop a tactic which will lead to the desired game outcome. In this case, representations are combined with performance to make sense of a circumstance; some modalities are considered more suitable to the communicative purposes of the circumstance than others. The representational function serves to frame engagement by combining two complementary processes of experiencing. The first is a cognitive process instantiating patterns of appropriate responses to clusters of situations, based on accumulated practical knowledge (e.g. people are expected to act differently in situations framed as 'playing a game', 'running a game', or 'watching a game'). The second is an embodied process of strengthening, modifying, enriching or replacing these patterns as people make sense of the particular dynamics of an event and respond to it at the time of its unfolding.

With regards to walking, the representational function is evinced in the ways the socio-cultural world informs the performance, experience and signification of walking and, conversely, the ways walking may shape the signification of socio-cultural spaces and processes. Specifically, the representational function relates to the purpose, conditions, socio-cultural context and experiential outcomes of walking. Walking acquires meaning through its primary purpose which may be, indicatively: a) itinerating, i.e. travelling on foot from one specific place to reach another; b) wandering, i.e. walking about without a particular aim; c) exploring, i.e. looking for something noteworthy to acquire, to document or to enjoy, as in hunting or in collecting mushrooms; d) parading, i.e. walking in an organized ceremonial way, as in processions, litanies, marches and demonstrations; e) exercising, i.e. walking as a way to maintain a good physical condition. Furthermore, cultural representations of walking include social, spatial and temporal conditions and preconditions that delimit terms of access and modes of performance; for example, marching is normally performed collectively in a designated time and place. The purpose and conditions of walking are further defined discursively by the socio-cultural context in which it takes place (e.g. leisure, politics, art, consumption, religion etc.) and the ways participants fulfil, through their chosen pursuit of walking, desired experiential outcomes, such as mental stimulation, resistance, relaxation, play, sense of belonging in a social group or of immersion in nature.

Recurrent combinations of the above elements result in the establishment of socially recognizable and culturally signified patterns of walking, that correspond to ideal types. Ideal types form paths that interconnect selectively certain discursive resources. For example, *flânerie* has been a long-standing prominent ideal type of walking in modernity. *Flânerie* connects solitary walking with aimless wandering for mnemonic stimulation. Typically, *flânerie*

takes place in the urban space and in particular where the core of modern life is located. The notion of 'flânerie' was introduced by French poet Baudelaire to describe an artistic practice of relating to the growing urban life of Paris in the 19th century. In the interwar period Walter Benjamin theorized it as an emblematic sign of the modern human condition. In recent decades, contemporary artists have cultivated a hybrid version of flânerie by blending its aesthetic origins with the politics of the psycho-geographical *dérive* and the playful and performative characteristics of Fluxus/Land Art (Psarras 2017). In the same period, flânerie, often merged with the ideal type of info-nomadism, has been used as an evocative metaphor for navigation practices in digital telecommunication systems. The semantic journey of flânerie shows that ideal types are neither fixed nor arbitrary semiotic systems; rather their meaning is performatively modified, reorientated and multiplied as different actors appropriate them across social space and time. This spatial production of subjectivities through the performance of ideal types relates to the interactional and compositional functions of media walking, as discussed in the following sections. I envisage a more extensive multimodal analysis of media walking from this perspective, which will involve extending its methodology (e.g. discourse analysis of participants' documents looking at how they frame their media walking projects), but also relating it with other research approaches to the socio-cultural practices of walking (e.g. Amato 2004; de Certeau 1984; Inghold & Vergunst 2008; Richardson 2015)

2.2 The interactional function

In multimodal analyses, the interactional function of a communicative event refers to the ways in which participants relate to each other through the production and use of semiotic modes. Echoing Halliday's work on systemic functional grammar, the bulk of multimodal analyses mainly discuss how semiotic modes mediate relations between humans in terms of social distance, contact and attitude and how they place participants in specific positions of involvement and power when they form interpersonal relations. The present study of media walking as a communicative event leads to a more expansive account of the participants and their positionality. In this account, the environment and the media in use do not function merely as a context and a set of referential objects providing semiotic resources for interpersonal relations; rather, they are also considered agents in their own right participating alongside people in interactions that produce meaning. Moreover, since multimodal interaction is a process, rather than a momentary event (Norris 2004), the positions of participating agents are not absolute and static, but relational and dynamic. The location that any participant occupies, semantically and spatially, is always defined with reference to the location of other agents in the interaction. In walking, this spatial relation is subject to temporal changes through movement. Consequently, the regions of interaction are not distinctly demarcated and signposted, but are continuously shaped through acts of approaching, departing and forming paths.

Walking is configured as a meaningful experience through the ways walkers relate to the environment and, in the case of media walking, to the media apparatus. In the multimodal analysis vocabulary, the term 'binding' (Strenglin 2009) captures the relationships between a space and its occupants, for example the degree of openness or closure of space that produce feelings of security or insecurity. In media walking the notion of binding can be extended to the relationship with environmental and physical elements of the surrounding space such as the air, the temperature and the morphology of the ground, that stimulate a wide range of feelings (e.g. exposure, instability) and emotions (e.g. excitement, fear, expectation, nostalgia).

In media walking users also interact with locative technologies that guide their navigation in the physical space and with mobile media content that provides additional information about the space navigated. Moreover, locative and mobile media technologies are in an interactive relation with the environment through inputs and outputs that result in their mutual augmentation: technology mediates the environment by adding extra layers of location-specific information to it and conversely the environment augments technology by providing the locative cues that render it pervasive. In this sense, the interactional function of media walking as a communicative event includes and redefines the role of immersion. In the context of mediated user experiences, 'immersion' has been associated with a powerful rhetoric and with media practices for the construction of a distinctive mediated hyperreality, which is cut off from its physical surroundings. In the case of media walks, as I discuss below, immersion provides distinctive locative information that transcends the real-time of the walking area, but it complements rather than effaces the actual spatial experience of the physical environment.

A multimodal analysis of the interactive relations between walkers, environment and technologies in the course of media walking highlights two important dimensions: a) the multiplicity of interfacing and b) the potentials of interactivity. In media walking, the field of interaction is extended beyond user-to-screen, forming multiple interfaces (human, material, physical, technological, environmental), which in turn increase the available modes in action. For example, the experience of media walking crucially depends on paving as an interface of the walker with the ground. Asphalt, concrete, slate, cobblestone are modes that offer quite distinctive semiotic resources in terms of their cultural history, affordances, functional load and materiality. Another parameter is the distribution of potentialities between the agents participating in the interaction (e.g. the degree of participation, the perceptibility of interfaces and the intensity of the bi-directional exchange of information). For example, in the relation between the technology and the environment, the emphasis is usually on how locative mobile media can augment the physical space and not on how complicated environmental processes and events can influence the hardware and software of mobile technologies.

Across the nexus of multiple interfaces, the dynamics of interactivity in media walking are orchestrated through body movement. Body movement generates, processes and regulates the flow, the intensity and the content of pertinent information. By bringing together senses,

feelings, emotions, thoughts, discourses and representations through movement, the body becomes a nodal agent for the production of cultural experiences and meanings. Thus, the body becomes prominent in a multimodal analysis of media walking, not so much for its expressive functions (such as gaze, gesture, facial expression), as for what it provokes, receives, triggers and enacts through its movement. In this sense, embodiment is not merely one of the complementary modes in a communicative event, but a catalyst for the emergence of meaningful interaction. Therefore, a multimodal analysis of media walking attaches particular importance to the emergence of multiple modalities as they arise through embodied interactions in space, but also conversely, as they guide and motivate moving through these embodied interactions in a meaningful way. This brings us to the compositional function of media walking.

2.3 The compositional function

The compositional function refers to the pursuit of coherent meaningful experiences bringing together the representational and interactional functions. In media walking, this involves the organization of the production of meanings and experiences through the mixing of time-based modalities with space-based modalities. As Kress (2003: 35) remarks, there are different semiotic principles for spatial and temporal modes, with respect to how the meaning potential of resources becomes available. In time-based modes (e.g. speech, dance, music), semiotic resources unfold sequentially (e.g. one word/gesture/note appears after another), whereas in space-based modes (e.g. a poster, a streetscape) multiple resources are simultaneously present (e.g. images with texts, buildings with cars and pedestrians) and distinguished semantically by semiotic principles of their spatial distribution, as in the case of placing an image of central importance to the center of a picture (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Of course, if we focus not on the organizing principles of semiotic modes but rather on modalities, as the acts of sensing and processing of semiotic resources, then the process of meaning-making in space-based modes always involves modalities that are spatio-temporal. Therefore, in our approach to multimodality we can go beyond treating space as static.

The underlying logic in media walking brings together spatial and temporal modes: multiple resources become present (and meaningful) as walkers move sequentially in space. Media walking presupposes a common ground of kinesthetic practices formed through joint actions of bonding, orientating and traversing. A bonding action sets the conditions for humans to relate with non-human agents, particularly by guiding the physical-semantic movement of walkers into the space, through acts such as instructing, urging, advising, asking or inviting. An orientating action identifies the position of the walker with reference to the location of another walker, object, technology or event. An orientating action forms a relation, though its fulfilment still lies ahead and is still potential. A traversing action connects data dispersed in space forming sensory and semantic trajectories. Traversing, also common in the use of hyper-

texts (Lemke 2002), is similar to the practice of 'information linking' in multimodal ensembles (van Leeuwen 2005).

The ways these practices are realized in media walking depend decisively on the variables of tempo, range and vector. Tempo refers to the varying intensities in time, sliding along the dimension of acceleration-deceleration in a continuum between motion and stasis. Range refers to the varying extensions in space, including the dimensions of distance-proximity, visibility-invisibility and perceptibility-imperceptibility. Vector refers to a dynamic process of forming a direction for movement that brings together the intensities and extensities of time and space of tempo and range (see also Kress & van Leeuwen 2006).

The spatio-temporal variables of tempo, range and vector could be applied to modes concerning human movement as well as to modes concerning the movement of non-human participants. For instance, not only walking, but also sunlight and mediatized content, vary in time, form areas in space and move towards a direction (or multiple directions). In media walking, an analysis at the compositional level looks at how the relations of human and non-human participants in a communicative event become potentially meaningful, not only through the transfer of information, but primarily through the process of their interaction (Finnegan 2002). The variables of human and non-human participants are not only co-present as their values change, but also inter-related, configuring 'regions of interactions' i.e. areas in which the variables of one participant agent could be recognized and modulated in relation to the variables of another. For example, in GPS-based media walks, walking into a geo-located area activates mediatized content which, in turn, may affect the pace and directionality of walking. These compositional features could be further elaborated with reference to the 'actional-structural' ties (Lemke 2002) by showing how existing structures are activated through walking and how walking unfolds a dynamic field of relations that may lead to new arrangements.

In media walking, regions of interaction become the basic compositional fields for making meanings by forming sequences of performative spatialities. Regions of interaction fade in, change and fade out as their variables of tempo, range and vector, semantically affect and are affected by the kinesthetic ways of conditioning movement (bonding) of the walker with spatial reference to other participating agents (orientating) resulting in narratives composed by moving through space (traversing). In this way, embodiment becomes the process of orchestrating, testing, merging and transforming relations between walkers, media and the environment. In multimodal studies, the notion of embodiment captures the embodied production of meaning that relates physical experience, multimodal resources, media practices and social spaces (MODE 2012).

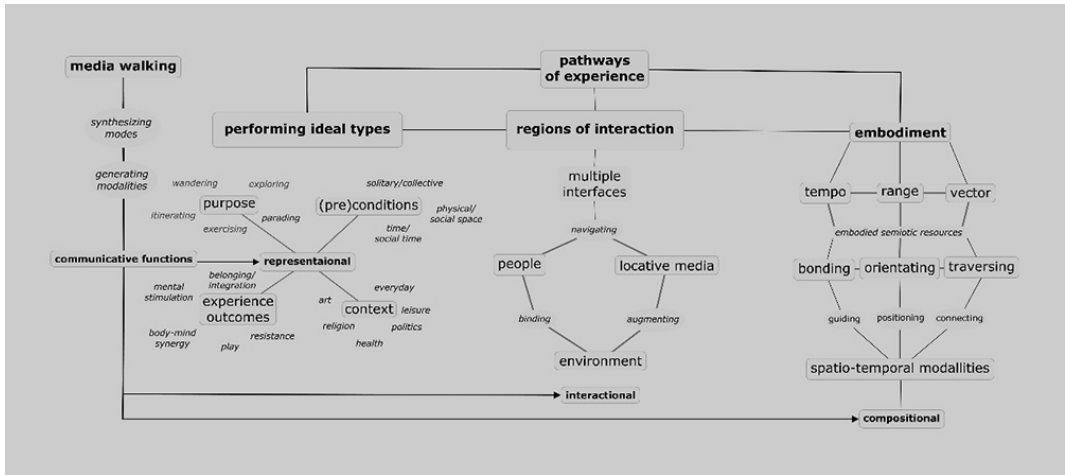


Figure 1. Analytic diagram of the proposed multimodal approach to media walking

Figure 1 summarizes the above multimodal analysis of media walking as a communicative event that creates ‘pathways of experience’ in the space of embodied inter-actions between walkers, multiple modalities and the environment. In the next section, I will trace the ways media walking creates ‘pathways of experience’ in two case studies: an acoustic walk (*Breath*) and a multimedia walk (*Soundscapes/Landscapes*).

3. *Breath* and *Soundscapes/Landscapes*

Breath is the title of an acoustic walk created by composer Dimitris Kamarotos in the 1st Cemetery of Athens. The location of the walk is a historical site with beautifully carved tombs, statues and sculptures of prominent dignitaries from the political, cultural and economic history of Greece. On the representational level, *Breath* is a collective walk performed in a particular place and time. Participants are enrolled and form a temporary collectivity walking together in an organized quasi-ceremonial way. All this happens in the context of an organized cultural event that resembles the walking form of litany in order to ‘propose the opening of a place of thought through the blending of urban and natural sounds with memories inscribed on marbles’ (Kamarotos - excerpt from artist’s statement). At the entrance to the cemetery, before the walk begins, Kamarotos sets the interactive conditions of bonding walkers, semiotic modes and the environment by summoning the participants around him and presenting briefly the aim of the walk and instructions for the performance. A printed leaflet, given to the participants in advance, shows the direction and the stops of the itinerary, and includes two short texts related to each stop.

In the context of the present article, I focus on the spatio-temporal modalities designed and developed during the stops of the walk. A stop is activated temporally and spatially when

the guide raises his hand holding a printed sign of the stop number. Walkers open their leaflet to identify their location on the map and to read the two short texts related to the particular stop. Unlike traditional guided tours, the texts are not intended to provide information conforming to an official narrative about the monuments at the stop (e.g. notes about the renowned deceased or the sculptor of the tomb), but rather to create a conceptual framework for the collective experience. The function of the first text is to provide a sensory description that proposes ways of listening to the location: how and what walkers may listen. The second text offers excerpts from literature that can be linked associatively to the ongoing spatial experience. Prompted thus to identify the location, to direct their senses and to develop associations, walkers now raise their head from the leaflet and develop their in situ sensorial-associative relation to the surroundings. At the same time, artificial sounds are occasionally produced by performers who move around the group of walkers. According to Kamarotos, the aim of these sounds is to awaken the senses, particularly hearing. After a while, walkers hear a discrete bell ring marking the end of the stop and they resume their walking.



Figure 2. Stopping at *Breath*

In *Breath*, stops are the most carefully designed part of the acoustic walk. In contrast to the rare and sporadic sounds designed into the walking part of *Breath*, during the stops a dense assemblage of visual, textual and aural modes is activated through gestures and body movements performed:

1. raising the number sign → marks the beginning of the stop
2. looking at the map → locates the particular position in the entire route
3. reading descriptive text on the left page → guides sensorial activity
4. reading conceptual text on the right page → proposes associations
5. making 'artificial' sounds → stimulates the sensorium
6. ringing the bell → marks the end of the stop and the resumption of walking

These embodied modalities are extended semantically as they induce the interactions of walkers with the environment, unfolding sequentially kinesthetic pathways of experience through movements, perceptions, responses and feelings. Specifically with respect to the semiotic resources of tempo, range and vector discussed above, the raising of the number sign extends its range of visibility and creates a vector for all walkers to direct their movement. While approaching, walkers explore the surrounding with quick glances and slow down the

pace until they stop. Standing still is the kinesthetic prerequisite for being temporarily engrossed in the texts and for being silent for the dense acoustic experience of the stop. At the same time, stillness is an embodiment of the pervasive peacefulness of a historic cemetery. After having gathered and read the texts, walkers quietly stare, or some of them approach, the marble tombs nearby. As they disperse within a short distance from the raised number sign, they persistently look around to locate the nearby sounds of the birds and the distant background noise of the city, both visually hidden, concealed in the foliage or blocked by the high pines and cypresses.

Thus, in *Breath* it is during the stops that the aim of the acoustic walk is fulfilled exemplarily in the practice of stillness. Far from idleness and motionlessness, stillness is what carries walkers to develop their own micro-movements for sensing the multi-layered and circumambient dynamics of the material, physical and cultural environment of the cemetery. *Breath* does not reproduce the official narratives of the historic place, but lets participants discover material manifestations of these narratives that cross their path. In this sense, the moment of stillness creates the time and space for reorientation out of the linear itinerary. Once these moments are performed quasi-ceremonially, then they may happen at any point of the itinerary as walkers appropriate the proposed practices of processing the available resources to develop their own pathways of experience. It is the artist's intention that pathways of experience proceed smoothly at the shifting intersections of two divergent processes: the alive, but fleeting world of omnidirectional sounds and the eternal presence/absence of death arrested in the fixedness of the marble.

While *Breath* is designed around assemblages of modes concentrated on particular spots of the walking route, in *Soundscapes/Landscapes (S/L)* multiple designed modes are distributed throughout the walking area. If *Breath*, revolves around the idea of expanding points of a linear itinerary toward multiple potential directions, *S/L* concretizes an extended space as the nexus of connections between multiple points. In *Breath* stillness is a precondition for developing pathways of experience; in *S/L* the core of the experience is constant choice through movement.

S/L uses a mobile multimedia application to mediate a walk in the neighborhood of Neos Kosmos in Athens. The project was created by the art collective Medea Electronique. *S/L* renders the multifaceted cultural character of Neos Kosmos through various semiotic modes: written excerpts from literature and philosophy, audio field recordings, oral histories and life stories, short experimental musical themes and video art presentations of local activities. On the representational level, *S/L* is attuned to the ideal types of flaneur and the info-nomad, as it is designed accordingly to be an individual walk for wandering, exploring and discovering 'hidden' and unexpected facts and events. The walk can be performed anytime in a wide but well-defined area, as long as someone has secured in advance the necessary technical setup. The project was funded by the Onassis Cultural Centre of Athens, which is located in the area,

thus an additional motivation that informs the design of *S/L* is to inscribe the presence of this institution within its surrounding area of Neos Kosmos.

In the brief discussion that follows about the conditions of developing pathways of experience through *S/L*, I focus on some textual directives it provides to users, as guidance for moving and for relating mediatized content with the surrounding physical space. As users move in space, short texts variations such as the following appear occasionally on their screen: *'There is no correct path. If you do not know which way to go, simply improvise. There is no way you can get lost'*; *'You don't have to follow a certain direction. So don't get stressed over experiencing S/L correctly. Around every point, near or far, there are other points. Go back, move forward, cross streets, squares, parks, roads'*; *'You don't have to look at your tablet and your map all the time. Let yourself be swept by emerging soundscapes'*.



Figure 3. Walking in the hybrid space of *Soundscapes/Landscapes*

These exhortations may sound paradoxical; walkers are directed not to follow the directions, and to drift while they are reassured that they won't get lost. The apparent contradiction aptly demonstrates the hybridity of the space in which the media walking experience arises. *S/L* provides an extended, dense and incessant assemblage of different semiotic modes. Some are explicitly marked on the map (such as video presentations), other appear on the screen automatically (e.g. the texts discussed above – left image of Figure 3) or as interactive links (right image of Figure 3). In any case, the communicative function of the modes conforms to their typical cultural history: the oral histories and the life stories of the residents provide 'authentic' accounts of the local social life, video artworks show the creators' idiosyncratic approaches to spatial events, abstract textual excerpts from literature and social theory act as interferences to site-specificity. Furthermore, all modes are narrative-independent and location-specific, therefore they can be reached from different directions and become interconnected in different ways. Thus, the way someone moves becomes a decisive practice in making meaning, since it is through movement that different modes are activated and come together

to form multimodal ensembles. In other words, as Vasudevan (2011) observed, it is not only how multimodality occurs that is important, but also when and where. In the case of *S/L*, this observation can be extended to connect multimodality with multimodality.

Multimedia applications comprise dense assemblages of media and modes. In the case of a multimedia walking application, such as *S/L*, printed maps, books, street signposts, a compass, photographs, videos, speech and sounds are all integrated on the screen and audio output of the mobile device, blending into a common mediatized environment. However, a new medium, such as mobile apps, does not merely assimilate older media forms as its content, but it also expands the objectification of the senses and, by extension, the objectification of experience (McLuhan 1994). Hitherto, the objectification of experience, which in the case of digital media is exemplified in the rhetoric and practice of immersion, typically has involved disassociating the media content from its time and space of usage, to create ubiquitous immersive media environments. This predominant cultural logic of objectification and of immersion is manifest in walking with mobile multimedia applications, but at the same time it undermines itself, as the extension of the sensorium can happen only if the mediatized experience is (re) connected to the actual body and particularly to the actual location of the body in the physical space at the particular time of walking.

The variations of textual directives in repetitive display during the *S/L* media walk, act as a leitmotif about how to form pathways of experience in walking with mobile digital media. Drawing on the communicative functions of language, proposed by Jakobson (1960), the short texts are addressed to walkers (conative function) by suggesting ways to orient towards the environment (referential function) in order to ensure that the bonding of walkers, media and the environment remains open and continuous (phatic function). For a communicative event to emerge in the hybrid space of media walking, such bonding is vital but cannot be taken for granted, given the predominant cultural logic that equates media usage with dissociation from the immediate environment. In the case of *S/L* this logic may be reinforced inadvertently as the sheer amount of digital information on the screen sways walkers' attention. The repetitive textual directives are designed to offset this dissociative pull of the screen. The on-screen information is designed to guide walking toward concrete places (a coffee-shop at the corner, a church close to a bridge), compelling walkers to discover the exact locations. Thus, in this type of media walks, the pathway of experience often becomes similar to treasure-hunting.

The activation of a potentially non-linear assemblage of mediatized semiotic modes through body movement does not constitute, in and of itself, a media walking experience. The modes mediated by the screen and the earphones do not form a self-contained mediatized environment. Rather, they always direct attention to particular objects, facts, events in the physical space. This deictic function can only be accomplished if the walker becomes aware of the actual referents and forms personalized experiences while walking. In this sense, an ethnographic approach could shed light to the ways walkers bring together the mediatized

spatial representations with their actual spatial referent in their personal imaginative world to make a sense of place.

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

Media walks are organised cultural activities designed to provoke meaningful experiences of a place through physical movement in interaction with mobile media. The multimodal analysis of media walking that I propose draws on the three communicative meta-functions of an event (representational, interactional and compositional), particularly as they have been elaborated in research about diverse modes of communication including language, visuals, digital media, gestures and 3D spaces. In media walks, the function of walking is inter-modal, as it serves to synthesize various modes in a multimodal ensemble and to generate modalities through the embodied and mental engagement of walkers with the semiotic resources they encounter. In this sense, my multimodal analysis is a kinesthetic elaboration of these three inter-related communicative meta-functions: representation is encompassed into the performance of ideal types of walking; body movement is constituted as a dynamic field of interactions between human and non-human agents; composition emerges from tracking the semantic organization of multiple modes through the formation of pathways of experience.

Multimodal analyses do not form a 'self-contained field' (van Leeuwen 2005: 1). In the same vein, the present multimodal approach is not so much a firmly structured conceptual framework, but more like a gestural movement towards it. It provides a point of departure and conceptual vectors that can be followed, elaborated, modified and redirected as they come to be applied to diverse forms of media walking. The cultural, medial and environmental characteristics of media walking set three axes of research that provide, in their combination, the coordinates for further research. Indicatively, the intermodal function of walking can be elaborated by considering the intersensory processes discussed in multimodal analyses, not only from a social semiotics perspective, but also within other fields such as mobile computing, particularly in studies that assign embodied meanings to data input-output exchanges. Semiotic analyses of modalities as ways of sensing, processing and experiencing the affordances of modes can be enriched greatly by engaging in a systematic dialogue with media theories, both new and old, that foreground a practice-oriented engagement with the materialities of the media and consider their interconnection with the environment. Finally, since media walks are organized cultural events, their multimodal design practices are organically and discursively connected with the agents, patterns and flows of institutionalized cultural production. As such, they provide multiple and dynamic ways of acknowledging and intervening in the spatial production of subjectivities, at the cusp of micro-intentions with macro-policies and of power relations with creativity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their thorough reading, insightful observations and helpful comments which contributed to a further elaboration of certain aspects of the paper.

REFERENCES

- Adami, Elisabetta 2015. What's in a click. A social semiotic framework for the multi-modal analysis of website interactivity. *Visual Communication* 14(2): 1-21.
- Amato Joseph 2004. *On Foot: A History of Walking*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Bubaris, Nikos 2015. Media Walks: Culture, Media and Design. In: Theona, Iouliani & Charitos, Dimitris (eds) *Data to the People*. Research Institute of Applied Communication, University of Athens, 317-323.
- Burn, Andrew 2013. *The Kineikonic Mode: Towards a Multimodal Approach to Moving Image Media*. London: NCRM. Available from: <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3085/> accessed February 18, 2017].
- De Certeau, Michel 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth 2002. *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Arnold.
- Ingold, Tim & Vergunst, Jo Lee 2008. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Jakobson, Roman 1960. Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics. In: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed) *Style in Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Kamarotos, Dimitris. Breath-Artists' statement. <http://www.sgt.gr/eng/SPG1657/> [Accessed October 28, 2017].
- Kress, Gunther 2003. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Kress, Gunther 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Kress, Gunther & van Leeuwen, Theo 2006[1996]. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Leander, Kevin & Vasudevan, Lalitha 2009. Multimodality and mobile culture. In: C. Jewitt (ed.) *Handbook of multimodal analysis*. London: Routledge, 127-139.

- Lemke, Jay L. 2002. Travels in Hypermodality. *Visual Communication* 1(3): 299-325.
- Lyons, Agnieszka 2016. Multimodality. In: Zhu Hua (ed) *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A practical guide*. Wiley-Blackwell, 268-280.
- Martinec, Radan 2000. Types of Processes in Action. *Semiotica* 130(3/4): 243-268.
- McLuhan, Marshall 1994. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- MODE (2012). *Glossary of multimodal terms*. <https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/>. [accessed March 25, 2017].
- Mondada, Lorenza 2014. Bodies in action: Multimodal analysis of walking and talking. *Language and Dialogue* 4(3): 357-403.
- Norris, Sigrid 2004. *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction: A methodological framework*. London and New York: Routledge.
- O' Neill, Saleph 2008. *Interactive Media: The Semiotics of Embodied Interaction*. London: Springer.
- Psarras, Bill 2017. Street and Spatial Stories: Performing the Transgressive Step. In: Dalila Honorato and Andreas Giannakouloupoulos (eds) *Taboo - Transcendence – Transgression in Art and Science*. Corfu: Ionian University, 808-830.
- Richardson, Tina 2015. *Walking Inside Out. Contemporary British Psychogeography*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Stenglin, Marie 2009. Space and Communication in Exhibitions: Unravelling the Nexus. In: Carey Jewitt (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London & New York: Routledge, 272-283.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo 2005. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London & New York: Routledge.

Nikos Bubaris is Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication at the University of the Aegean, Greece

E-mail: nbubaris@ct.aegean.gr