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A Meander Walk in the Tagliamento (Italy)

22 March 2023, 11:30 to 12:00 am.

Marie-Anne Lerjen

Crick, crack, clack... the stones under my advancing feet collide, clack, crack. Fine music. Slowly I put one foot in front of the other in the wide riverbed of the Tagliamento in northern Italy. A light wind is blowing. The sun sheds a warm light. Wide silence. Click, clack. In the transition to the sand, the steps become almost inaudible. Crack. Washed-out pieces of wood break under my soles. I let my gaze wander and see, widely scattered, others walking as well.

A little before that, we followed our guide chattering in a crowd. From our overnight stop along populated roads, over the high bridge at the narrow spot between two towering hills, on the grassy path between fruit trees. Arriving at the edge of the riverbed, a wide landscape opens up with sand, stones, small shrubs. Here we stopped.

We are on a seminar trip with the Chair of Philip Ursprung in the Friuli-Venice region in the north of Italy. Under the title «Desire Lines. Following the Last Alpine Wild River», we are following the longest unregulated river in the Alps from its source to its mouth. It meanders, in ever-changing loops, in the wide riverbed towards the sea. We align ourselves with the direction of the river, the river shows us the way.

Now we are here, at the edge of the riverbed where we will be walking all day. A short rest. We look for shade, drink, the calls go back and forth, the conversations continue. Then we gather and I take over.

I am a walking artist. For more than 10 years I have been exploring the possibilities of walking in a group.

A



B



C



A—C Meander Walk, 22 March 2023. Image: Tobias Wootton

Scores developed for specific places and contexts provide the experimental framework for experiences of deepened perception. I have been invited to propose a «walk» here as well. I introduce myself and present the following score:

«WALK SLOWLY, BUT STILL HEAD TO THE
ADRIATIC SEA.
SPREAD, BUT STILL BE AWARE OF THE GROUP.
DON'T TALK.
TAKE WITH YOU THE WORD «TO MEANDER».
YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES.»

40 people slowly start moving, begin to spread out
leisurely. Where are we? - - - - -

A whoop with an echo gives the signal to gather again.
We reassemble downstream. Half an hour is up.
Church bells start chiming in the widely scattered vil-
lages. We break the silence, exchange ideas. How
do we begin to feel and know where we are?

– I felt the silence immediately. But also the heat, the
weight of my backpack. Then my eyes opened
to the plants near the ground, tiny animals in the sand.
I began to tune into the riverbed. – I could no longer
lift my gaze from the ground. The stones drew
me in. I remembered how I had collected stones with
my father back then. – I felt like a child again. Play-
fully eager to discover. Astonished. – I followed the
sinks, the rises, followed past movements of the
river water. – Suddenly I was aware of my own sounds,
the rhythm of each step, the texture of the ground. –
I could draw, sketch, without anyone looking over my
shoulder. – I suddenly had time for my own expe-
riences, letting the ground guide me, alone, yet con-
nected. – I touched the wet sand, took off my
shoes, walked barefoot. – I felt great joy, lost myself
in daydreaming while strolling around. – Suddenly
I found myself in this large scale, the body became
my reference. – I realised that this landscape was

completely formed by water, even though we didn't see the water yet.

Many voices come together. * They show that not only the group has expanded in this riverbed, but also the outer and inner perception of each individual has expanded. Half an hour of walking silently in the riverbed of the Tagliamento opened up space and immersed us deeply into the place.

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Marie-Anne Lerjen is a walking artist. In 2011 she founded «Lerjentours. Agentur für Gehkultur» in Zurich. She has dedicated herself to walking experimentation. She develops artistic walks to come along, performs, speaks and writes about aspects of walking. Since 2012 she has been a research and teaching assistant at the Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) programme of the Institute of the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich. In 2023 she conceived and organised the MAS study trip «Walking Kassel».