

Apostlahästar på Gotland

A 'secular' pilgrimage

*"Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Just walk beside me and be my friend."*

A walker.

I define pilgrimage as an ancestral ritual form of travel where the journey is taken under a purpose to reach a specific place, be it a holy or memorial site. But also, it is a framework for participants testing themselves mentally and physically where are fostering to overcome personal fears. As the American writer Rebecca Solnit states, (travellers) "...retain much of the content of the pilgrimage: the subject of health and healing, the community of pilgrims, and the earning through suffering or at least exertion". Being a Pilgrim means sharing a path with other people that have the same attitude. Taken the spiritual concept of pilgrimage, the journey requires a ritualistic behaviour from the participants.

Nowadays, pilgrimage have become a popular form of travel for seeking a punctuation mark in one's personal biography. That is due to success of Camino de Santiago - 280.000 pilgrims in the last year, an all-time record -. As an economic model for growing depopulated areas, local authorities made a special effort to make this sacred path popular again. The method was to open the religious path to 'secular' pilgrims: everyone can make a pilgrimage including those who are not religiously motivated.

I realise the motive behind a pilgrimage is similar to that behind a tour: both are quests for non-quotidian experiences. Tourists, like Pilgrims, allow themselves outside the everyday life to be carried away in pursuit of renewing experiences. This recreational demand is echoed by the tourism industry that includes in its holiday packages sacred routes and secular modern pilgrimages -like *Elvis Presley's* grave at Graceland or '*Trees for Life Day*' in Flevoland. Last summer, the **British Pilgrimage Trust** created a secular pilgrimage "*to honour the 100 year anniversary of Jerusalem (the song), [...] making a 125 mile pilgrimage from London to Sussex, the birthplace of the song*".

Through my artistic practice, I have found in pilgrimage a framework to converge my Catholic background, the exploration of old sacred traces, the creation of ritual contexts and the organization of relational platforms. For exploring the pilgrimage phenomena, my approach is based on three issues: ritual as a performative journey, walking as aesthetic practice and travelling as a reflection of human behaviour in the shifting world in which we live.

But, based on practice-based research, a new issue has become the most interesting issue for my artistic practice: *Communitas* as relational situation. Defined by the anthropologist **Victor Turner**, *Communitas* denotes a strong sense of unity among ritual participants that transcends the daily differences of their social life, such as class, status, education, employment, or political affiliations. This spontaneous sensation of mutual communication and unity could be denominated as 'fellow-feeling'.

As a continuation of my experimentation on walking linked to relational act, I will research pilgrimage as generator of *Communitas* through the creation of a 'secular' route: **Apostlahästar på Gotland**. Under the analogy of Tourist as a Pilgrim, the methodology of the project is twofold. First, to design a sustainable tourist-journey on a hedonistic place. Secondly, to involve people to join it in communal experience.

As a contextual framework: Gotland, an island located in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Since ancient times, the island has been a meeting point for the surrounding cultures. From the 70's, Gotland is an appreciated tourist destination. For its cultural-historical heritage and natural environment is the favorite summer destination in Sweden. For that, I visualize Gotland a metaphorical model for the alienation of everyday life.

Apostlahästar på Gotland is a path goes along by using the Medieval Churches as path-markers. The route will start on an old watchtower in the south of Gotland, only a few meters away from Sunde Kyrka. Going north, the pilgrimage will pass by and connects to medieval churches, farms occupied since ancient time, summer bathing places, artist studios, eco villages, seaports, museums, archaeological remains and low-population parishes... Following the ritual approach, the last step will be done in the night under full moon with the purpose to reach the lighthouse of Fårö on the sunrise of August 8th. As a symbolic metaphor, the end of the path means the beginning of another one.

"Pilgrim stems from the Latin *peregrinus*, which originally meant foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveller, as well as newcomer and Stranger", as the professor of Anthropology Noel B. Salazar pointed out. The pilgrims of **Apostlahästar på Gotland** will explore the island from an abroad view beyond of tourist-eyes by seeking a non-ordinary travel through the temporary role of pilgrim. Following the Susan Graseck's concept of '*Explore the Past to Understand the Present and Shape the Future*', the route will highlight the historical legacy of Gotland in relation to the neighbouring Baltic Sea legacies in order to create a room for discussing the current political situation in the area. For breaking the alienation between visitor-tourist and local-provider, the pilgrim will approach the social capital of Gotland: hospitality -as sleeping in churches, barns...-, trade - as providing food from local farmers and fishermen- and community -as meeting local people in the vacation time-.

Through the 'fellow-feeling' among the participants, my role will be to promote collaborative labour of participants and construct situations in which new ideas will be enacted in communal process: experimenting the 'suffering' of walking outside the comfort zone, sharing knowledge and experience, cooking dinners for local inhabitants and creating modern rituals.

Communitas, Spirituality and Walking converge in **Apostlahästar på Gotland** following the concept of 'archetype of journey' by the professor of architecture **Francesco Careri** in his book *Walkscapes*: "*The primitive roving lived on in religion (the journey as ritual) and in literary forms (the journey as narrative), transformed as a sacred path, dance, pilgrimage, procession. Only in the last century has the journey-path freed itself of the constraints of religion and literature to assume the status of a pure aesthetic act.*"

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*I am a pilgrim. I first walked on Camino de Santiago in the summer 1993 when I was 16. This pilgrimage was a summer camp arranged by the **school-seminary Cristo de El Pardo** - Franciscan monastery on a nature-protected mount near Madrid- where I received 6-years education for becoming friar in to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins. I did not take the vows. But walking to Santiago was an experience that I have been seeking as a personal and aesthetic statement. After my first way I did 4 different pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela. As a wanderer interested on sacred manifestations, I have been following S:t Olav's steps during my studies at **Royal Institute of Art**, Stockholm. Supported by KU funding from my school, I created a community for walking on S:t Olavsleden twice. One on an old 560 kms Scandinavian pilgrimage from Sundsvall to Trondheim. Second on a new-created 60 kms path from Burgos to Covarrubias in Spain -Camino de San Olav-. In November 2016, I did my first pilgrimage by horse riding in Gotland together a diverse group of people with support of **Baltic Art Center**. The goal of this 3-days path is a ruin of S:t Olav's chapel.*

I walk. I walk as both pilgrim and artist. I walk for creating a social exchange. I walk for understanding myself in a stranger environment. I walk for exploring. I walk on a route made by stories that people tell me. Now, when walls are built to separate people, I propose to go through a route to join people. I want to make a journey by foot as a reflection of defining feature of the current society: Travelling as escapism of everyday life and encounter with the other.