

...but also DO

A view of Véronique Chance's *Thames Run: Source to Sea*
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Véronique Chance runs as a form of art — her art is running. But that isn't all her art is. Concerning herself with questions of location, its relationship to an audience, and the documentation of what she considers the performance of running, Véronique matches these to the technology of live streaming, GPS tracking, and photographic documentation from her perspective of a run. This blurs the boundaries of where the audience is situated, as often viewers watch in step with Véronique's movements, and it makes documenting the performance an activated element of the whole, not simply a second-hand record of the event.

Much has been written about the art of running, but these subjects are often more about the sport, the physicality and endurance of running, or the mental states achieved through running. Véronique's engagement with running as a creative performance is a reminder of the limitations of the body. Tracking her progress is not intended only to portray a real-time perspective of what she is experiencing while running. She also asks viewers to consider the proliferation of technology in the landscape and the reliance we have on it. Her art practice runs along the fault lines between the fallibility of both body and technology, and the potential of experiencing the body within nature in a different way.

I want to consider another aspect of what a practice like Véronique's offers though. I want to look at Véronique's practice in terms of Agnes Denes' *MANIFESTO*¹ and her implicit call *to do*. I also want to consider the connection between the poetic and the political that *doing* unearths by considering Véronique's work in relation to the artist Francis Alÿs.

In a 2019 address to students at Harvard Graduate School of Design, to whom Denes gave a rendition of her *MANIFESTO*, she wrote, '...don't just live within the walls of your own mind, but also DO...' ² What interests me in Véronique's practice is not that she runs, but that she *does*. In *Thames Run: Source to Sea*, the *doing* was an attempt to physically follow the course of the iconic River Thames by running. The result of that doing highlighted the conflict of wealthy privilege against the right of access to natural resources that has long troubled British history.

Denes' *MANIFESTO* is indeed an inspiring call to action to live a life of creative challenge for the greater good. It is a call to question, to strive, to see, and to work with paradox, while wisely assessing significance and insignificance, never giving in to limitations that others have accepted. In *MANIFESTO* Denes extols 'understanding the finitude of human existence and still striving to create beauty and provocative reasoning.' Such a statement opens onto a wider view of our existence on the planet, accepting its ultimate limit while seeing the value of *doing* in the time we have. In this way, *doing* means knowing where limitations and possibilities run side by side.

¹ Agnes Denes' *MANIFESTO* can be found at this link: <http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works15.html>

² Denes, A. "Pioneering conceptual artist Agnes Denes addresses the students of Harvard Graduate School of Design." *Rouse Visiting Artist Program, Harvard Graduate School of Design*. 19 April, 2019. Available at: <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2019/04/pioneering-conceptual-artist-agnes-denes-addresses-the-students-of-the-harvard-graduate-school-of-design/> Accessed: 21 July 2022.

I see this same kind of principle of *doing* in Véronique's work, albeit on a smaller but no less important scale. Exploring boundaries, limitations, and how we see ourselves in nature while we live in a landscape that is more and more controlled by technology is as monumental an exploration as the problems of land misuse, overpopulation, world hunger, and water reclamation taken on by Denes in her projects. Véronique's work, however, has the smaller scale and poetry of the individual traversing a path. This personal trajectory of starting at point A and ending at point B, which many of Véronique's projects involve, indicates an occupation with a body moving in nature. Such a concern is innate, coming from the very beginnings of our human development. Following a path from the source of the River Thames to its end in the waters of the North Sea in *Thames Run: Source to Sea*, Véronique captures another poetic mystery of water that springs up from the ground coursing its way to join the open sea, and the relationship we have to this powerful movement that sustains all life on the planet. Along the way, she encounters obstacles of ownership that impede her progress on the designated free access pathway tracing the Thames. These obstacles require Véronique to detour, often miles out of her way, to meet up with the path again. This denied access is a political issue that arises from the *doing* that Véronique has undertaken by running the course.

This kind of poetry entangled with the political is akin to issues Belgian born Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs uncovers through his work, and the *doing* it involves. When Alÿs pierced a can of green paint and walked the division drawn on a map in green pencil by Moshe Dayan in 1948 separating Palestinian from Israeli, the poetry of his performance underscored the deep political strife symbolised by the liquid green line his paint made as he walked, and which this division drawn by Dayan is referred to historically. The title Alÿs gave the piece is also a kind of manifesto for his practice, *Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic*, (2004). This work is more commonly called *The Green Line*.

In *chaos, territory, art* (2008) philosopher and feminist theorist, Elizabeth Grosz, explains that art 'captures an element, a fragment, of chaos in the frame and creates or extracts from it not an image or representation, but a sensation...or a multiplicity of sensations....'³ What she means is through works by artists that *do*, we sense the magnitude of the issues their work uncovers. Through the poetry of their expressive endeavours, the very real political tension of human interaction is revealed in a way that we cannot experience in the historical, political, or journalistic telling. 'It is for this reason,' Grosz continues, 'that art is not frivolous, an indulgence or luxury, an embellishment of what is most central: it is the most vital direct form of impact on and through the body....'⁴ Therefore, Véronique is not running for her own experience, as the athlete does. She runs so that we can experience what transpires through the *doing* of her body in nature.

³ Grosz, E. *Chaos, territory, art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020 p.18).

⁴ Ibid, p.23.