

Hoofdweg (a possible line) - script
Radna Rumping, July 2021

1. You decide to let your hair grow

You decide to let your hair grow and there's no way of stopping it.

It grows so slow, you don't notice any difference from one day to the next. There is no visible change, no grand gesture. A more radical move is cutting it; I turn my life around and cut my hair off. Or shave it off. That's a single act, with an immediate impact: liberation, revelation, relief. Imagine the sound that goes with it: the sharp closing of the scissors, the nagging hum of the electric clippers. Choosing to no longer cut your hair is not a gesture, it's a silent knowing. Something that happens from within.

Of course there's other ways, other possibilities and impossibilities: hair grows slower than you hoped for, it suddenly falls out, it curls up into a voluminous fro, it turns grey, it knots together. You can speed up the process from short to long, with extensions or a wig. That's an option as well. But what if your hair keeps growing, ---steadily,--- and you feel like you're on a point of no return? You scroll backwards to last summer, and the summer before that; your hair was shorter back then, and it actually suits you better. You realise you were one, two, or three years younger there, but shorter hair highlighted that youthfulness; you seemed more lively, more present. Long hair, on a good day, makes your face read as serene, but on a lesser day could also be interpreted as sleepy, as if you're just letting it all hang.

Grow your hair! Stay in bed! These are lines from a public service announcement by Yoko Ono and John Lennon, sung about 50 years ago as they were lying in bed in a hotel on the other - richer - side of the city.

Bed peace. Hair peace.

Their infamous 'bed-in' was part of their honeymoon, a happening - a mix of a conceptual art work and a publicity stunt - to encourage world peace. Over the course of seven days they let themselves be surrounded by press and visitors, speaking about peace, as they lay down in bed, tucked neatly into crisp white sheets.

A decadent protest, with a daily breakfast of fresh orange juice and an egg boiled to perfection. A room with a white carpet, a room which today is rented out for 2000 euros a night, with the carpet kept pristine by replacing it every four months. There's much to say about the 'bed-in' and much has been said already, but let's zoom in on the internal, trivial, slow action made explicit here: staying in bed, and - growing your hair.

How does that work? Protesting for peace by growing your hair? Imagine your hair is short, then it won't grow over night. Yoko already had long hair way over her shoulders - and John followed suit. I often enjoy reading the comment section on YouTube, but in their case I have to look away; below videos of the two of them (music videos, interviews, the recordings of the 'bed-in') I land in a minefield of opinions and spiteful messages by people who claim to know them, and remain convinced of their own opinion, for the most part when it comes to belittling her. I don't want to add another opinion to that list. Yoko and John can speak for themselves, and they have done so extensively.

In the 60's letting your hair grow - depending on who you were, and where you were - had a different political meaning than it does now, we can picture the heads of hair, based on a wealth of footage of that time that's still in circulation. But can we paint picture of how it feels? The feeling of the hair itself, the feeling of knowing that it's growing.

You can make it explicit, you can talk about it as much as you wish, but one day the hair will just reveal itself, and someone will notice the difference, despite the fact that you've known all along.

What are you doing?

Oh, nothing special, I'm just hanging out here (quietly lets hair grow).

On the cover of her book Grapefruit, the 1970 version, shines a black and white portrait of Yoko Ono. Her face framed by her long black hair, a bit fluffy. An open gaze, observant, she looks straight into the camera. A smile, soft. She knows exactly what she's doing.

(intermezzo)

What I'd like to ask of you is a great elasticity

Imagine a line

And follow that line

Composer La Monte Young formulated this instruction in 1960:

"Draw a straight line and follow it"

I'm unsure if the line we're on is straight.

I see a different movement

Grab a ball, throw it, follow it

You pick it up again, throw it further, the ball keeps rolling

You pick it up again, and slowly, a line starts to take shape

Sometimes the ball gets lost

Sometimes someone else catches it and throws it further

Sometimes it rolls faster than you thought and you have to chase it, running hastily

But for now we don't run.

We walk.

Along de Hoofdweg. It comes naturally, you don't have to find your way, or question your sense of direction all the time, because the road is already there.

What are you doing?

Oh, nothing special, I'm just walking along de Hoofdweg (quietly makes a line).

2. Wavelengths

When she spoke about the work of Sands Murray-Wassink, the artist she had spent a lot of time with over the last year, her hand often made a gesture of a continuous, straight line.

"Look" she said; "This line is Sands. He's been making art since the early 90s, and hasn't stopped since. He has a daily rhythm. He draws, paints, writes, and collects perfumes all from the overflowing studio inside his house. He accepts every single art piece he makes, and never throws anything away. He calls this way of working 'Survival Acceptance Art'. His body of work is constantly growing. Even in the years when nobody asked about his work, nobody saw his work, and his partner Robin was his only audience."

Then, the straight line turns into small waves, flowing, one after another; as she says:

"Look; this is the time. This is what's going on right now, how society moves, how we are thinking, what we speak about. What's in fashion. And sometimes Sands' line lies far away from the waves of our time. And sometimes they are perfectly aligned."

In the same manner as she had looked at the ways in which Sands had shaped his career and art, Sands had been looking at artists from generations preceding him, calling them his 'guiding lights'. These were mostly female artists, many of whom received little to no recognition during their lifetime - or at least not nearly as much as their male counterparts.

He had studied them carefully, to seek out how they handled their visibility (or lack thereof), how their work was received and shared with the outside world, what they needed for their daily survival, and what all of that had meant for their careers, and for the care of their legacy. Now that Sands was 47, he started to reflect more and more on his own legacy. With the cookies still tucked away in their wrapper, the recorder running for over two hours, Sands shared his thoughts on this:

“It’s not that important to be remembered. It’s more that I want to have an effect in the world. It’s about change, about change and all that. And I have already done that, Robin and I together, that is already a relationship of change, I think. Because that is already having influence on the world, on someone. We also influence each other. It’s not that I Sands Murray... it’s not just about me. It’s about me, but it’s not just about me because it’s about relationships. It’s about Carolee, about Hannah, about Adrian, about anyone...”

She noticed how in the past years, several female artists were hastily ‘discovered’. Solo-exhibitions for women of 80+ years would pop up in renowned museums. In the praising press releases announcing the shows, they would be referred to as ‘far ahead of their time’. But were they? Which time are we speaking of here? They were around all along. How could it be that they were now, suddenly discovered? For most of them it happened too late: the discovery arrived after their passing. The discovery arrived after their physical and mental health had been under constant pressure from stress, poverty, setbacks. The discovery arrived after small seeds of bitterness had grown into firm branches with deep roots.

And for some it just arrived. Not too late, not in time. It arrived, and with a slight, mocking smile the artist was there at the opening, in a new silk shirt that paired nicely with the color of their trustworthy lipstick. Why not.

‘I don’t want to get bitter’

She spoke the sentence out loud, to silence any possible bitterness - a realistic danger - making its way to the surface.

Bitter, she? No way. She’d been able to subtly manoeuvre her way along and through the waves for years, had learned to stand her ground in all kinds of situations, with a soft smile, round shoulders, an open look on her face.

And she thought; the others will see this right?

But sometimes it seemed they didn’t.

Sure, it had to do with time. The passing of time. In which a life, which was never really planned, started to form into a path. We’ve been taught to understand that path more like an escalator, you get on it and move up, as if it’s nothing; from being alone, to being together, to having a family, from a small apartment, to a house with a garden, or ... you name it; an escalator of progress and prosperity. But a path can take on many other shapes: what starts as a paved road may end in a murky, sandy pathway into the forest (where you can twist and turn onto many other little paths). Or a walk along a straight avenue is suddenly interrupted by a roadblock, or an earthquake, a breach that doesn’t allow you to continue as you were before.

A path can also be less extraordinary, and hide in the everyday. For example, you might have a road, a road as a long line, and almost unnoticeably, the road continues, and you follow it until the end. Nobody dwells on it, nobody pays attention.

Is there something to see here?

Oh no, nothing special. You’re just looking at a long road.

But even alongside this nondescript road, which doesn’t aim to be spectacular at all, bitter thoughts might flourish. And that annoyed her. She wanted to get rid of them, pull them out, one by one, from between the cracks of the stones on the pavement, roots and all.

‘I don’t want to get bitter’

A friend nodded in agreement 'yeah you have to watch out for that'

'Saying it out loud is a good start. I don't want to make a fuss about it either. I don't feel like making myself harder, I don't feel like adapting. In the end, it's my pleasure too that gets taken away'

We recognised that pleasure in one another, finished our tea, and went our ways / continued.

3. Ghost riding (aka wrong way driving)

Het vervolg is waar het oude op volgt

The line seems to get interrupted. That's not true, we can make a slight turn, and we'll find our way back to the path again. But let's not forget where we are right now, because for a brief moment the line comes to a halt into a full stop, a stop here at Mercator, as in, the square.

In 1999 this square entered living rooms all across the Netherlands.

I saw Maggie swinging her bag at a police officer.

I saw the two towers marking the surrounding housing blocks

I saw

Cliff

Clyde

Steef

I saw an overexcited crowd, all dressed up in the right caps and track suits. A crowd that represented the youth of Amsterdam-West at that time, with Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish and Dutch roots.

And I heard:

Cliff, Clyde en Stefan zijn de Klokkenluiders (check de bass, de kick, de snare, de strijkers)

In 1999 Dutch-language hiphop group de Spookrijders (I'll come back to their name later) released the song Klokkenluiders, which translates to whistleblowers, with a music video that was instantly banned from a number of tv stations. But even in 1999, there was some version of tv on demand, and the video became a frequent request on music channel The Box, beaming the Mercatorplein into people's living rooms after all.

I saw Maggie swinging her bag at a police officer.

The video of 4 minutes and 10 seconds constantly cuts between two perspectives.

The first; grizzly, seemingly amateur video footage of a neighbourhood party on the Mercatorplein. About 1000 young people gathered on the square in front of a stage with a line-up of the latest local and national hiphop acts; Unique from Rotterdam, Brainpower, and De Spookrijders from Amsterdam West. The audience stands behind crush barriers and jumps along to the beats. One of the Spookrijders throws a t-shirt into the audience, which starts a small scuffle. The police on site (who are met with screams of 'fuck the police' from both the audience and the stage) get tense; they call in 80 additional colleagues, who show up with dogs and batons to empty the square. We see groups of young people running into alleys, beaten, we see Maggie swinging her bag at a police officer, we see people screaming. In the evening the square will be quiet again, but in a later newscasting of what would be called the 'Mercator-riots,' De Spookrijders are accused of egging on the audience.

The second perspective in the clip shows a very different story. We see a police car driving around the neighbourhood, circling the Rembrandpark, behind the wheel, Clyde, with his bleached dreadlocks, surrounded by Steef and Cliften - all three dressed in a police uniform. It's pure joy, seeing the way they casually move around in this uniform, how in a short scene, shot in slow-motion, they are now the ones chasing

a group of youngsters into a tunnel, and how these mocking scenes are interchanged with raps from the police car, arms loosely hanging out the window.

*Een echte vader is een man die voor zijn kinderen zorgt
Een echte moeder is een moeder als de mijne
Een echte emcee kan uit het hoofd rijmen*

The video was their way to turn around and reclaim what had become a derailed story.

The 4 minutes and 10 seconds are also a recording of a moment in time, a moment in the history of this square, this neighbourhood, this road.

Sprookrijden, literally translates to ghost driving, a Dutch way of referring to wrong way driving.

Spookrijden means driving a vehicle in the wrong direction, in particular on roads separated into different driving lanes. Many Spookrijders find themselves in the wrong lane by using an exit as an entrance, but about half of the cases consist of people who turn around on the high way, either directly, or via a parking lot, a gasstation, or sometimes to avoid a traffic jam. In most situations, the Spookrijder corrects his behaviour just in time.

4. The house is conquered

The house is conquered, the street invented.

These are words by architect Hendrik Wijdeveld, who, about a century ago, designed two identical, elongated housing blocks facing each other on the Hoofdweg. Their striking feature is their facade, one of the longest -and most stark - facades in the city.

Tick, tick tick, the repeating windows and the grey rectangles sticking out from the brick at the top create a staccato rhythm. A moment of acceleration.

6000 new houses were built in this part of the city between 1925 and 1927. Part of the development program Plan West, they were meant for working class families. An open call for the realisation of its design stated: "The architecture needs to be powerful and simple, a personification of a future class awareness of the worker. The architecture shouldn't be too stiff, and the exterior should speak to a friendly interior ... the colour of the whole must communicate freshness."

The interiors of the houses - most about 50 square meters big - were identical. The overall plan was described as a 'factory-made city', built in record time from reinforced concrete by a single contractor.

It's not the many individual houses, but their facades - designed by renowned architects - that make up a monumental whole. The house dissolves behind the exterior of strict lines, adorned with peculiar details (see the typography of the house numbers, the stained glass, the patterned brickwork) and more imaginative corners (gracefully rounded, or with a divergent tower).

Why did Wijdeveld want to conquer the house? It sounds as if, to him, there was nothing left to gain from it, he wanted to reach something bigger.

A century ago progress was thought of differently: the future was further ahead, and was understood to be more promising.

After this remarkable block on de Hoofdweg, he wouldn't realise many other buildings, but instead publish utopian - you could also say self-important - plans.

In 1944, and yes, that was the time of the Dutch famine, he proposed for an international geological research center a design with a shaft dug 15 miles deep into the earth. He called this project 'Plan the impossible'. A mile is 1.6 kilometers. Or 5280 feet. Or 2280 footsteps. His design presented a futuristic, dome-shaped building, with beneath it a shaft as a continuous line, becoming narrower as it disappears deeper into the dark earth. Those deeper layers of the earth were still a mystery back then.

Wijdeveld lived for over 100 years. Just as many years as de Hoofdweg has now.

About 50 years after the houses he designed were delivered, a new generation of workers - migrants from Morocco and Turkey - would settle in the area, gradually adding a new layer to Plan-West with their own shops and restaurants on the street corners.

Architects with big plans feel a bit suspicious these days.

Maybe it's time to look over your shoulder.

Try to imagine the two Wijdeveld-blocks moving into a vanishing point, destiny unknown.

5. The steps of stanley

He's not here right now, but I've seen the man with the slippers many times. He walks slowly but surely. Walking is difficult for him, but he sticks with it: he keeps moving forward, with little steps, his slippers shuffling over the pavement, making a rhythmic sound which can be heard from a distance.

The footsteps of this man must be smaller than 1 sb-step

1 sb-step equals one footstep of stanley brouwn.

1 step

2 steps...3...4....5....67.....319....1264

De Hoofdweg is about 3143 steps long

The material of artist stanley brouwn is distance and measurement.

And also time, space, direction.

One of his most known works is 'this way brouwn' a series in which he asks people in the streets for directions. The people he meets scribble a route on a piece of paper; sometimes with detailed directions, other times it's just a single swirly line, and sometimes the page stays empty, signifying the person asked didn't know the way themselves. On every piece of paper the artist later stamped the phrase 'this way brouwn'. As a viewer we don't know which directions were asked, and where the route was situated; 'this way brouwn' invites us to imagine that for ourselves.

Throughout his career, brouwn has always asked for imagination by not giving too much. And it is this abstraction, not filling things in, that can be a great gift.

He revealed very little of himself: we know he was born in Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam, the country after which the first square on de Hoofdweg - our starting point - is named. We know that he later lived in Amsterdam and had an address just a few streets away from where we are now, and that he taught at the art academy in Hamburg. After some detective work, we can probably find more, but let's not play detective. In the 70's brouwn stopped giving interviews, and didn't want his pictures or biographic information to be shared any longer. He didn't want his work to be reproduced in other media either. In anthologies of conceptual art of that time, pages on brouwn are often left blank. That empty space is not nothing. In that emptiness, brouwn is present, but we don't have to keep our eyes on the page, we can direct our gaze elsewhere, inward, or further outward.

The fact that brouwn didn't want to share information on his personal life, doesn't make his work impersonal.

Think about the footsteps. The measurement of distance, of walks, not in so-called 'universal' measurements such as a meter, or the English foot, but his foot. This way, opening up a space for your foot. Or my foot. Or the foot of the man in his slippers.

It is not about the universal distances in which our steps dissolve.

The step is conquered, the distance invented? No.

Our steps and our imagination to recognise his, as well as all other steps are part of brouwn's work.

Are you still walking?

Around this time you have taken about 2619 steps. We can't say with certainty if that would be the same amount in sb-steps. To know for sure, you should have done this walk with stanley brouwn.

His work is exhibited in museums, but often materialized in the form of a publication, with a language so clear and sober, brought back to the core, in order for it to shine further and brighter.

walk during a few moments very consciously
in a certain direction;
simultaneously an infinite number
of living creatures in the universe
are moving in an infinite number of directions.

How do your footsteps feel now?

brouwn spoke about himself in the third person, in one of the few interviews he gave, published in 1967. He said about this way brouwn:

'brouwn makes people discover the streets they use every day. A farewell from the city, the earth, before we make the great leap into space, before we discover outer space.'

6. Where paths meet (unraveling)

What I'd like to ask from you is a great elasticity

Imagine a line

And follow that line

In Spring 1964, Yoko Ono made her 'Line Piece' with the instruction:

"Draw a line with yourself

Go on drawing until you disappear"

I'm unsure if the line we're on is straight

I see a different movement

Grab a ball, throw it, follow it

You pick it up again, throw it further, the ball keeps rolling

You pick it up again, and slowly, a line starts to form

Sometimes the ball gets lost

Sometimes someone else catches it and throws it further

Sometimes it rolls faster than you thought and you chase it, running hastily

But for now we don't run.

We walk.

Along de Hoofdweg.

In a public conversation in 1966 Yoko Ono speaks about her 'instruction paintings'.

"My interest is mainly in "painting to construct in your head", she says. "In your head, for instance, it is possible for a straight line to exist - not as a segment of a curve but as a straight line. Also a line can be straight, curved and something else at the same time. A dot can exist as a 1,2,3,4,5,6 dimensional object all at the same time as you wish to perceive...A sunset can go on for days, you can eat up all the clouds in the sky."

What are you doing?

Oh, nothing special, I'm just walking along de Hoofdweg (quietly makes a line).

100 years ago this road got the name Hoofdweg. 'A central road' is what the sign near our starting point says.

There was a plan. To 'elevate' the worker. Hendrik Wijdeveld was busy conquering the house.

The time kept running, the road changed, or well, it was more the surroundings that changed; with ever-changing residents, who might speak with a heavy Amsterdam accent to Arabic, with in some parts - such as here in Bos en Lommer - new housing blocks and supermarkets that display their fruit and vegetables on the sidewalk. But also the arrival of the swapfiets rental bikes. Air bnb guests. More distraction on the side roads.

De Hoofdweg was simply there, you didn't notice it. And exactly in that space between the unnoticeable and monumental - I give you a line, with a possible starting point - hides a big invitation. For a movement. Of acceptance and stubbornness. Casual and to the point at the same time. Of a very long, slow run-up.

Imagine a diving board.

You take all day to walk the twenty steps of the ladder.

You're able to take your time, because nobody else in the pool seems to be interested in using it.

Whilst you climb, your hair keeps growing, you can't stop it.

Once you're at the top, you try to estimate the amount of steps it takes to jump from the board itself. It must be about 14 of them. You decide to take two days for that distance. And in that time you think of other lines of flight;

How De Spookrijders, slowly drive their police car through the Rembrandtpark;

How Wijdeveld draws a sharp, diagonal line onto carbon paper;

How the man in the slippers, shuffles along de Hoofdweg everyday;

How Yoko Ono smiles, thinking about the line she drew in her head, a line she then makes disappear

How Stanley Brouwn determinately walks through cosmic rays.

On the third day

Or was it after 3 seconds

Or was it after the past 30 minutes?

You go further.