

Ways of Walking and Not Walking

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The first walk I remember really taking, a walk for a walk's sake, was with my family in Lion Rock country park in Hong Kong. We walked through the park approximately to the point that the trail we were following met the MacLehose trail, and then we stopped. I remember the humid smells of sub-tropical springtime, questioning my fellow walkers about various elements of our surroundings (rock-formations, flora, fauna, other walkers), why we were walking in the first place, what else we were going to do with the day, and why we had stopped when we did, as I felt able to continue for much longer at the pace we had set. Even in my seven-year-old mind, the process of walking led, in many ways to contemplation and interrogation, of the surrounding environment, of the human relationship to that environment, and of the walking process and related issues of mobility and ability in relation to that.

In *An Examined Life*, taking a walk with Sunaura Taylor around San Francisco's Mission District, Judith Butler speaks of the process of walking thus:

I'm just thinking that nobody takes a walk without there being a technique of walking; nobody goes for a walk without there being something that supports that walk; something outside of ourselves. And that maybe we have a false idea that the able-bodied person is somehow radically self-sufficient.

Gary Snyder, too, in *The Practice of the Wild*, links the act of walking to a technical framework, and also to physical ability:

We learn a place and how to visualise spatial relationships, as children, on foot and with imagination. Place and the scale of space must be measured against our bodies and their capabilities.

Returning momentarily to my Hong-Kong walk, its reason was in the main familial - my mother's parents had come to stay with us, the idea of a Sunday afternoon walk brought together both the European and Asian sides of my family in a shared activity. Tourism, in the main, determined the choice of Lion Rock and the MacLehose trail; who, after all, could visit Hong Kong without looking on that quite stupendous landmark. The reason for the walk's length and duration was due to relative physical ability with relation to our surrounding environment - the 30' heat was too much for a long trek for my Scottish grandparents, and my younger siblings. Both sides of the family shared interest in our surrounding flora and fauna; in broken English, more conversation was had during that walk than over the dinner-table the night before. In both my thought about the walk now, and my recollections of my seven-year-old train of thought, then, reasoning moved through the immediate

process of walking through an imaginative visualisation of the space (Snyder), to form what Butler calls 'a technique of walking': the act of walking both at the time and in recollection of the event, leads us to elucidate some sort of reason for the walk, and thence also supply some sort of conceptual framework. In Butler's case, this introduction to the idea and technique of taking a walk leads us into a comparative study of what taking a walk means in the context of both disability and gender studies, questioning society's conception of the 'able bodied person' as somehow 'radically self-sufficient'. Observing Butler's walk, the act of taking a walk, and talking whilst walking - the 'something outside ourselves' which supports the walk - also becomes a shared ground of experience, a means towards understanding *across* abilities and disciplines. The walk is possibly the most basic way of developing an understanding of our surroundings, and of testing our limits. The way we walk (or do not walk) in relation to this surrounding environment and in comparison with and relation to others is a means to personal, interpersonal, and cosmic understanding. In the case of Butler and Taylor and Snyder and Harrison, the dialogic nature of this exchange is also paramount.

As well as a means to test ourselves, both physically and mentally, the walk also provides us with a site of memory - a concrete means by which we may interrogate a past. However, the walk is anything but concrete, and perhaps that is what leads us constantly, while walking either for a reason or for the sake of walking itself, to question the means of walking. In this way, the walk, the idea of walking and indeed of not walking, lends itself well to converging disciplinary studies. The way we walk, and how and why we walk, is a, perhaps the most, common ground. Indeed, what metaphor is more persistent in all fields of research, than that of the walk? Each person has a *walk of life*; understanding a person's walk of life is a means toward understanding that person - the walk here is a way to provide context. Just as disciplines have their *fields*, each critic has his trajectory, or *walk*, in order to traverse these fields, to discover new frontiers of thought and artistic and scientific practise. The walk is partly a bidding farewell, partly a movement towards. The one informs the other; the two are inseparable. The walk, too, with motion its essential element, is inextricable from the pause in motion, whether this is a temporary break along the way or, indeed, a beginning or ending. The walk is at once one of the the most basic human activities and also a means towards interrogation, achievement, protest or intervention, and ultimately, also, the simplest possible way of making a shared space and time. Where my walk as a seven-year old bridged and brought together continents and cultures, Butler's walk with Sunaura Taylor brought together different physical abilities and academic interests, making detours into the realms of gender-construction and political intervention. The walk is necessarily an act of intervention in some way; it is almost inevitably multi-disciplinary.

Walking conjures up a knowledge of limits - not just with respect to physical ability but also conceptual and geographical capabilities, interpersonal, cultural and social preconceptions. The walk for a walk's sake will demonstrate to us physical limits. The Walk in order to contemplate will test conceptual capabilities. The walk through an unknown space will test the

possibilities of geography; the walk with any person will test interpersonal understanding. Any combination of these elements will also test the limits of cultural and social preconceptions. Limits exist to be tested, pushed forward. In the interrogation of the limits, the act of walking, the act of talking about walking, and every metaphor related to the walk and its related space, is put under scrutiny. The act of true criticism does not only involve this boundary-crossing scrutiny and interrogation, but is also, as Wayne Booth points out, inherently dialogic:

To me, the most important of all critical tasks is to participate in -
and thus to reinforce - a critical culture, a vigorous conversation.

Both Snyder's and Butler's approaches to and comments on walking, above, are at their roots dialogic - Snyder's with Jim Harrison, Butler's with Sunaura Taylor. What this perhaps emphasises is the common ground element again: the walk is not only an act of critical interrogation and boundary-pushing, but also the (shared) walk also demonstrates an act of personal development and of critical care. Each of these elements will lead to reflection, some of this on the move, some of this at stopping points along the way, and some of this after a final stopping point has been found or a goal achieved. Within the critical culture surrounding the walk, the act of walking, and all the related metaphors, there is a strange temporality. Although the act of walking lends itself to being cast in a distinctly narrative mould, this is not necessarily the case. The walk as peregrination, or walk for walk's sake, may plot itself as some sort of vectorial path, but the interaction with the process of walking here goes a long way to muddling up this apparently straightforward temporality.

The pause in the walk is as important as the walk itself. In the first century AD, the Chinese poet Tu Mu writes

Climbing far into cold mountains, the stone path steepens.
White clouds are born up here, and there are houses too.

I stop to sit for awhile, savouring maple forests in late light:
frost-glazed leaves glistening red as mid-spring blossoms.

Naturally, this poem is immediately subject to the Romantic interrogations that we see so often surround any poetry stemming from the Rivers and Mountains tradition. But perhaps what is more interesting here is the manner in which this much earlier way of relating to the landscape by walking reflects those impulses towards multidisciplinary engagement of our contemporary thinkers, above. We know that Tu Mu's career, in contradistinction to many of his fellow poets, was one which was active politically. His poetry was influenced not only by his geographical surroundings (he made many journeys across China in the different stages of his political career) but also by the cultural and political; this act of walking in the mountains is opposed to the many politically-orientated journey the poet also made. In the act of walking, the artistic, the cultural, and the political combine. Walking is both a pleasure and a means to a transportive end. This multivalent process leads eventually

and always to some sort of ontological and ethical questioning. As David Hinton writes, 'Tu cultivates the enigmas of history, landscape, and natural process in the very texture of his poems [...] he opens the fundamental human enigmas of consciousness'.

As well as this, and perhaps most importantly for its context here, Tu Mu's poem also demonstrates the tricky temporality of the walking process, and the importance of not walking, or limitation, to the walk. Not much of the poem, entitled 'A Mountain Walk', is about the process of walking. Rather, we see a concern with the mediated (through the walker's vision) environment, the contemplation of which is facilitated though the pause in the walking process. The pause is our first moment of temporal concern. And pausing on this pause, we are led to notice that each element of the poem demonstrates a different temporality. First, 'climbing far into cold mountains', we are witness to the presentness of the possibilities of the walk itself - the path stretches ahead; we call to mind the ancient traditions of contemplation upon the *prospect* of the mountain, rather than the real process of walking up into the altitude and gazing down from the mountain. The speaker of the poem moves through and recognises his immediate surrounds. Here, too, attention is drawn to potential limits of the walk - 'the stone path steepens', there is a hint at the possibility of struggle against the environment here. Second, at this point, walking in the mountains as the path steepens, the surroundings gain more clarity. Our present now is not in the walking process but in the abstract particular of that which is noticed in the walk: in comparison to what, unmentioned, has come before, here we have white clouds and houses. In this act of contemplation, the climbing of the first line is placed in the past. Thirdly, we have the pause, which leads to further contemplation in and of the surroundings of the walk. The pause / process of contemplation extends into the final line of the poem. And yet this part is only a pause in the walk - 'I sit awhile', but then, unspoken, the walk will continue - the walker cannot rest in the mountains, away from clouds and houses, among autumnal maple-forests, forever. Just as the walk extends across a landscape it also gives us pause, and this pause, or contemplation, is an endlessly accretive process.

The final twist in temporality of Tu Mu's poetic walk is the manner in which its composition interacts with the walking process. Just as, in the poem, the pause is as important to the walk as the walk itself, here, the past subject of the walk is rendered present again as the poem is composed. In many ways Tu's poem is, rather than a simple walk, a re-walk. Indeed, many reflections on walking (and reflections on the reflections that walking gives rise to) occur in some pause after the event. In this way, we can constantly revisit and reinterpret the terms and conditions of the 'technique of walking' integral to the act of walking itself. And what better way to expand and extend this interrogation of the technique of walking to the acts of talking, and of writing about walking.

Critical Dialogues was an afternoon symposium on walking held at the Scottish National Museum of Modern Art in Edinburgh in July 2011, organised by the W.A.L.K. (Walking Art Landscape Knowledge) research project at the University of Sunderland. Originally conceived as a symposium around the

subject matter of art-walking, the remit of the day expanded, naturally, even at the conceptual stages, due to the necessarily multidisciplinary nature of any thinking or talking about walking:

Critical Dialogues on Walking Art Landscape and Knowledge seeks to examine and interrogate the practice and process of walking in all its cultural, ethnographic, poetic, and geographical ramifications, and bring together innovative and speculative ideas on walking, landscape, and social, cultural, artistic, vocalic, and geographical constructions of space.

Just as we move through space by walking, for whatever reason, we also come to form and frame the space through which we have walked. The consequent interrogation takes into account each elements of the titular acronym of the University of Sunderland's research project. Each of these elements, too, takes its place in Butler's and Snyder's discourse on walking, above. And observed in a different way, each may give way to any one of the ramifications of or ideas on walking delineated in the symposium blurb, above, testing the limits of each discipline. Each or any combination of these elements contribute in some way to and produce some sort of reflection on Butler's 'technique of walking', and Snyder's 'spatial relationships', Booth's 'critical culture'. Again, walking, or the walk, provides a common ground.

Participants at the *Critical Dialogues* symposium came from a wide range disciplines demonstrating diverse academic and practical approaches to walking, and the three papers, too, developed diverse theories around the act of walking. To read these talks, now, also brings to light the age-old analogy that has been made between the text and the landscape, the writing as path, the writer as walker. In *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit writes

To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination... To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide.

And yet the act of writing marks a pause in the process of walking itself, a movement from the physical act of walking into the realms of walk-as-metaphor, which, as we have seen above, can lead to an important critical pause, an interrogation of the act. *Critical Dialogue* represented such a critical pause. The papers which comprised the main body of the symposium, given by Misha Myers, Alec Finlay, and Matthew Beaumont, mark a stabilised point of this dialogue, and it is my pleasure to (re)introduce them here. The three papers, one from a performance artist, one from a poet, and one from a literary critic, all circling around the same theme (that of the walk) promised to be excitingly diverse in scope and approach. And indeed they were. But, equally, many variant lines of flight were created between the papers, and progression from one to the next, and, indeed, the discussion that punctuated this progression, created coherence rather than disparateness. Taking time to look at rather than listen to the papers, formal as well as thematic lines of flight may be drawn between each, the conclusion from which we may draw is that the walk, and the act of thinking about walking, not only takes time but

also takes a radical approach to both time and thought. These three talks express this in different ways both thematically and formally.

Misha Myers's 'Enduring Gravity: Footnotes on Walking, Duration, and Distance' takes as its starting point the idea of a 'lentology', extending Paul Virilio's ideas of slowing down and acceleration into the domain of performance art, and the art of walking. Myers posits the importance of adopting (whether accidentally or on purpose) a means by which the spatio-temporal experience of the walk may be altered as a technique of interrogating the practise of the walk itself. The walk becomes a way of rethinking our present relationship with space, but also provides a means to interrogate past conceptions of space and the walk. Questions of mobility, in terms of endurance and duration (concerns we will find common to all three papers) are raised, as each of Myers' 'footnotes' looks at practices that '[push] the boundaries of human capacity' in some way. And, as we have seen, the walk itself is defined by what it is not - the idea of the pause, and of boundedness.

Of course, if we trace Myers' track back to Virilio, the thought surrounding slowness, or the slow walk, in comparison to acceleration, becomes necessarily multidisciplinary. Virilio, in 'Continental Drift', links super-speed of transport and communications technologies to surface-space and the blurring boundaries of globalised geographies, thence mapping this onto subject-centred discourse and identity-politics:

[P]retty soon... a nation's geographical depth will disappear. But so will all topographical asperities, those hills and steep valleys that were the pride, the splendour of the regions traversed... The current waning of institutional borders, echoing the decline of natural boundaries, will then be accompanied by the waning of the interval that once divided the peoples of Europe into nation states

Indeed, elsewhere in his work (again testing the idea of boundaries, Myers' Virilio 'footnotes' focus particularly on *Negative Horizon*) Virilio decries the amount of time that super-speed contemporary man spends sitting down as he no longer needs the apparatus of the landscape, a map, a pair of walking boots, in order move at lighting speed across borders and through spaces. So, as we increase our affective map of the world, it is likely that the related exponential decrease will be in our ability to *take time*, to, like Tu Mu's walker, 'stop and sit awhile' during the walk. And the walk, too, is important in this process of contemplation. And so, too, is the sticky temporality of the manner in which we engage with the time of walking, or, as Myers writes, the importance of the manner in which 'the walker switches-back, turns, retraces and falls between steps and gaps in thought'. In many ways, therefore, Myers' slow walking praxis becomes an intervention, not only into the linear space-time of the walk, but also into physicality of the walk itself, calling as if a manifesto for the continued questioning of the idea of endurance and the walk; putting forward and looking back upon the 'technique of walking' we would need in order to accomplish a more than natural feat of walking.

As with Misha Myers' talk, Alec Finlay is concerned with the interruption or intervention into the congenitally perceived easy and linear process of walking, and the use of this new perception, or 'footnote' as a means to interrogate the walk itself. From the starting point, the paper's title, 'Mountaineering in Counterpane: A Report to the Armchair Mountaineering Club', Finlay posits the innumerable imaginative possibilities of the walk. From a poet's-eye-view, Finlay straight away moves away from the endurance-feats of Myers' footnotes into something shorter, more personal. For this talk is also a confessional. Coming from a long line of walkers of sorts, Finlay uses this talk as a base to explore his own ability (or inability) to walk: he is, as he states, 'confined by a muscular contrition / to the short walk, sometimes the *very short walk*', and when walking with others will often find a stopping point at which he will wait for the more intrepid. But of course this stopping point is also the point at which the imagination will walk on (see, again, Du Mu's poet, above). The landscapes of Finlay's father and their family walks becomes a movement out from these short walks, but is bounded too, by the long period of Ian Hamilton Finlay's agoraphobia. Contrast to that the mountain-bound strides of Finlay's great-grandfather, Seton Gordon. But the process of walking, and of knowing one's limits, is not just biographically bound for Finlay, it is also tied up with the process of making.

As Myers has presented us with a talk structured as a preamble followed by seventeen 'footnotes', Finlay also takes on a non-linear, discontinuous, and discursive structure, giving us ten 'walks'. The talk, we can see here, is also lineated, calling up his art as poet, and allowing Finlay structural freedom to breathe between lines. Each 'walk' Finlay gives interrogates in some way (through the telling of a past walk, a personal walk, of an art-project, a ritual) the '*walk beyond the walk*'; the complicated mesh of metaphor and reality that ideas of walking and of viewing call up. Where Myers notes the limits of the imagination in the face of physical pain, using the example of Tim Brennan's *Codex Crusade*, Finlay points towards the opposite of this, that

The imagination can dominate
any physical experience

[...]

A walk defines the distance to or from society
physically an also in terms of the *psyche*.

The meaning of a walk is defined
by the interpenetration of the body and memory.

It exists on a spectrum running from the purely physical
to the purely imaginative.

On the subject of John Cage, Finlay riffs poetically on one of Cage's stories of a shared walk, the imaginative boundaries between humans thinking, and the manner in which the shared common ground of the walk can lead very disparate thought processes towards dialogism and imaginative, as well as

geographical, progression. Finlay, thus, plumbs a line of walking inheritance; In 'Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)', Cage riffs on lines from Henry Thoreau's book, *Walking*. Here, Thoreau is concerned with the purity of the experience of the walk (in this case, the walk in the woods), stating the importance of entering the landscape both physically and in spirit: a turning away from the rest of the world both physically and mentally, and a turning towards the woods physically, mentally, with the senses similarly and completely turned. Thoreau asks 'What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something outside the woods?'. Of course, Cage muddies this essentialist attitude to the experience of walking, first quoting this phrase from Thoreau, subsequently asking 'What business have I in the woods if the woods are not in me?', simultaneously calling for complete and reciprocal immersion in the landscape, yet complicating this attitude of complete immersion through the very structure of the work in which the manifesto is articulated: this *Diary* is a tissue of quotations, stories, and forms; in order to move to a process of landscape-experience deeper somehow than Thoreau's, Cage must first reference and build upon Thoreau. In doing this, Cage establishes a sort of metapoetic dialogism, a paradoxical call for a temporal presentness of walking predicated on a specific past idea of a presentness of walking, which Finlay subsequently builds upon in his ideas of the essential nature of *imaginative* as well as physical, literal, walking. Finlay looks back to Thoreau's first principle of walking experience through a Cageian lens and asks how far the imagination, too, may travel. Like Cage's, Finlay's text here is built upon various stories, quotations, and forms, all pointing to the different temporalities that different attitudes to walking, and their subsequent articulations, engage. And so Finlay, like Myers, engages with the tricky temporality of the walk as well as with the physical and psychical possibilities that humankind is endowed through their ability to walk and not walk.

Matthew Beaumont's talk 'Beginning with the Big Toe: Perigrination on Bipedal Plantigrade Locomotion' is a meditation on the big toe, a *manifestoe*, and as such, an intervention on the subject of walking much in the same way as Myers' and Finlay's talks have been. But here, Beaumont begins not with the walk itself but that which gives man the ability to walk: his hallux. Again we are concerned with the physical nature (or as Beaumont writes) the 'physics' of walking, with ideas of slowness and speed, technique and limitation. Where Myers draws from Virilio, Beaumont begins with Bataille; like Myers' and Finlay's talks before it, Beaumont's is both diverse and diverting. Indeed, the beginning is in humour, and the talk goes on to riff on the reality and metaphor of the big toe across disciplines and cultures, times and places. Again, the talk has a multiple of exploratory structure, taking a triplicate approach to the idea of walking - the anatomical, the anthropological, and the philosophical. And again there is a movement towards multidisciplinary through these multiple views of walking; Beaumont's *manifestoe* seeks to 'defamiliarise ... the act of walking'. Where Myers' and Finlay's talks deal with the limits or extremes of the walk in terms of structural and physical boundaries, Beaumont's talk looks at one extreme of the body, and moves on from there.

Mobility is the key question here, or, rather, humankind's peculiar and defining aspect of mobility: their *obligatory bipedal plantigrade locomotion*, i.e. the human art of walking upright, on two feet. For Myers, the artistic practise and philosophical reflection on the possibilities of a lentology disrupts basic walking. For Finlay, basic walking is disrupted through limits imposed on the body and the imaginative processes of walking. In both cases, the walk is in some ways a fugitive - a movement necessarily delimited by its stopping points. The big toe, or hallux, itself provides us with the mechanics of this fugitive movement - hallux, as Beaumont points out, deriving from the Greek *halmos*, meaning to spring or leap. Beaumont, however, returns us to the most basic physics of walking: the big toe 'provides the impetus needed to walk'. And yet reflection upon the big toe also leads us towards all sorts of digressions and disruptions; Beaumont writes '...if one thinks about walking as one walks, if one looks down at one's feet and really thinks about it while performing this most unthinking of everyday activities, one simply stops, topples over, or collapses'. And so we cover up the big toe, both psychologically, and physically. Beaumont's paper looks at many elements of the physiologico-aesthetic paradox of this 'ingloriously glorious digit', providing an intervention and re-view, in terms anatomical, psychological, and intellectual, for and of the big toe. As, at the beginning of this introduction, I have made reference to Judith Butler's comments on the 'technique of walking', Beaumont's physics of the big toe presents us with a technics of walking. Like Butler, Beaumont destabilizes the cultural perception of the able-bodied walker's 'radical self-sufficiency', instead positing a more humorous, fugitive, open efficiency which is by definition unrooted. Reflection on these multiple manifestations of techniques of walking ought, just like the walk itself, bear to, both physically and imaginatively, give us pause, a pause which gives way to contemplation and interrogation, of the surrounding environment, of the human relationship to that environment, and of the walking process and related issues of mobility and ability in relation to that, a demonstration of which occurs in the three papers which now ensue.