

A Meditation on Walking
(walking is the making)

INTRO DECEMBER I am sitting at the southwestern most point in Europe. I have arrived in the dark, to witness dawn break over cliffs, to sit and listen to the waves. Winter hiking in Portugal means solitude on beaches, cliffs and pilgrimage routes. I am quiet, readying to track time in a manner that is bound to a quiet joy and a steady walking gait. I watch the sun rise in the only way it knows how- proceeding steadily upwards. Light enters the sky and spreads out over the water, over everything, a passage of time that knows no prescribed distance or boundary.

The waves are unapologetic, forceful, persistent, constant. They have shaped this coast that is ancient and old and unfolding daily. I walk a beach near Lagos and run my hands over a cliff which is really layers and layers of history: small animals, shells, *things* of the water revealed. I am simple in my dailiness: acts of walking, writing.

Traveling through small coastal cities I collect all the blue I can: tiles from old army barracks high on a hill, a home in Sintra, a storefront in Lagos. A blue feather from Algarve, blue shells from Luz. I do this on every trip I take, every walk. I collect my way of being from the world, from family, from long stretches of time away from home. I collect my way of being as I walk this world, whether from the prairie in Illinois or the southwestern deserts or the coast of Wales, places I know intimately and hardly know. I take what I know, all these blue pieces, and weave them together. Here is what I see: my way of being in the world, is my way of making a life, is my manner of making choreographies of the daily. These choreographies of the daily are often about walking; walking to the grocery, or walking as far as I can, out into the fields before the snow comes. What I am curious about on the walk buoys me forward into choreographies of durational acts, site specific makings, duets built on scores investigating exhaustion, endurance and the sensuality/the geographic of both internal and external landscapes.

This writing is a test site for following conscious impulse, the impulse I follow as I walk long distances. My writing is akin to a nomad's way of seeing a map: *liquid and shifting*, fluid nodes that are integral to an understanding of current location. Nodes that are temporary, erased and reworked with each new wind, each new snowfall. My scraps of collected blue are maps to me- I can tell you my location, where I was coming from, how the land scrapped up against my fingers as I bent down to unearth a bit of blue. I roadmap this writing with meditations on the color blue, photographs of how I choose to see the world, and thoughts on the passage of time.

Blue, like a Satin Bowerbird: collect everything and hope for something. (Rearrange until you find it.) I intend the same for this writing; I rework the writing daily. Today, this is the route through.

FRANCESCO CARERI

BLUE, LIKE A SATIN
BOWERBIRD: The male
Satin Bowerbird collects all
sorts of blue for his nest:

My intention here is to take you on a long walk, and along the way, maybe uncover a few choreographic devices used for the dancing. My ways of being are indeed my ways of making a dance, a life.

plastic and metal and berries and cloth. All gathered blues are woven, arranged, piled, then rearranged within the nest. All the blue is necessary to entice the female bowerbird, to ensure its species survival.

This will be a long walk, settle in.

Score for walking: collect everything blue



A GATHERING OF BLUE: I am sorting through all the blue I know: Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*, Carol Mavor's *Blue Mythologies*, Yves Klein *Leap Into the Void*, or his period of smearing maps and globes with blue, erasing boundaries. Bas Jan Ader's *In Search of the Miraculous*, an act of sailing into the blue, never to return. The blue of distance as I walk the Midwest, the blue of desire and the blue of the sky that is the light that scatters, never reaching us. Motel pools and the blue gymnastic carpets with small springs underneath that when I laid down I could smell sweat and feet and chalk. My grandmother's blue veins with skin so soft but veins are not really blue. The first time I wore a UNITED STATES OF AMERICA warm up suit readying for international athletic competition, heart beating a bit too quick in my chest. There is the blue of the sea that leads the eye out towards a flat horizon and the blue of dreamtime. There is the feeling of blue, a place I know intimately and hardly know.

HOW I WALK. As I walk, I am feeling the ground beneath my feet, not always a conscious action. But I think much negotiation is going on kinesthetically: I'm learning the ground's texture, give, rebound. These are all indicators of the potential rhythm of my walk. The rhythm that we negotiate together, (the ground + my footfall) determines how long and how far I will walk.

WALKING THE FLATLANDS. For the past three years, I've been walking the flatlands of southern Illinois. I'm understanding that to reckon with the flatness/ unending distances of the Midwest, I must use each stride, or the accumulation of striding, to activate episodic attention, a constant checking in with what is central to my vision, then zooming out to check periphery. Back and forth I go, never getting too absorbed in the detail in front of me that the possibility of the moment is lost. In Midwestern terms, this sort of attention in seeing/ sensing is akin to tracking the immediate flatness of the ground at my feet while still seeing that the land as a whole contains a gentle ebb and flow that could be called slightly hilly. This sort of looking is best understood on day long wanderings. This zooming in and out is a state of mind, is a physical action, is an activation of my back space and side body. Episodic attention on the walk tunes me into desire- where it lies physically in my body. What sort of desire I am tuning into: melancholy, blue of distance, looking towards the horizon? Or, am I tuning into desire as conscious impulse, gut sensing? When I am tuned into desire as conscious impulse, and able to honor that knowing in the gut, that says *turn here*, or, *stop right here and listen*. THIS is when I divert from my known trajectory, end up in unexpected, curious places.

THE WALK BEGINS IN A STATE OF INCOHERENCE. I begin the walk fuzzy/ cluttered; small worries darting, forced cadence in stride, head down. After a while, my striding begins to add up to a simple rhythm, a meditation to follow (one and a two and a-) or something close to that. Rhythm established, I rely on it to send me through space accumulating a knowledge of *durational horizontal locomotion*. Now time begins to work its way my striding. My limbs become long, loose arms swinging, armpits big hollows catching the dust's hidden messages. Pelvis pushing forward, legs extending lazily far into the possibility of the next moment. *You walk like a cowboy* (I've been told.) I walk like a cowboy, long loose hips, tired flanks, slightly too wide rambling step and I can see Paul Neumann walking over the mountain past Alejandro Jodorowsky's cowgirl crossing a sea of sand and I am Isabelle Eberhart no Patti Smith walking Coney Island.

SOMETIMES I WALK WITH MY EYES CLOSED. SOMETIMES I DREAM WHILE I WALK. Experiencing bits of the walk with eyes closed, removing visual spatial indicators allows me to hear/ smell/ feel a place with more sensitivity. Patti Smith muses over this in her writing, I think in *M Train*- talking of the possibility of each sense articulating time in a different way. And this sort of deep sensory listening is more possible when sight is disappeared, for a moment. Dreaming while walking: there are dreams right behind the eyelids and there are dreams at the blue of distance, a place I cannot reach on my walk, and there are dreams that are more like images, that appear to me and I understand, as I walk.

BARBARA DILLEY + JOHN STILLGOE
both reference episodic attention,
in their writing on dancing,
in their writing on walking the
urban city.

LEO STEINBERG: *horizontal durational
accumulation of all our dailiness*

*I dream I am biking a hiway, I don't know
where to sleep for the night. I continue on,
more hiways. I stand in a median as cars
rush by. I am in an airport or a place that is
wide and open sterile; white spaces of
nothing. A door opens, a man invites me in, I
accept shelter and enter. He lays me down
his countertop- granite- splits open my
chest, reaches his hand inside my chest and
pulls a big fistful of weeds. He speaks: you
don't need these anymore. Then I am*

I have always dreamt my choreographies, sometimes waking in the night, an image of the work bright and burning, other times while walking, stumbling upon the image that is the thing. My methodology for choreography stays simple: I record my dreams. I realize them into movement. I allow incoherence to live for a long while before logic comes into play. (Incoherence allows desire, impulse, distortion in perception of gravity- a deep trust in it all.) I trust that my work is gaining logic, on the inside, because time is passing and we (all I invite into the space with me- light, the spider walking the floor next to me, spirits of those who've passed) are choosing to pass it together. I allow my relationship to the materials to remain ambiguous, passing through realms of what the body could be. I look towards the horizon of the Midwest as a starting point for reckoning with past and present ways of being, ways of making.

awake. I am sure the dream has ended because I can see myself pressing buttons to turn off my alarm and I feel myself add clothes to my body. Later, I am walking through the Illinois prairie; it is still dark out although it is not night. I am walking through an unfamiliar section of the prairie - larger almost treelike plants grew up around me. The sky is clear. Sounds feel empty, whip by, because the air is thin and spread out. There is the call of pheasants off to my left and far to the right, I know the deer are standing alert. My eyes are open and I know I'm walking south but I keep touching my chest and stumbling forward, as if upon waking, my heart has a larger space to pump and jump around and pull me downward then hook my sternum to the stars. My vestibular system cannot be trusted, gravity is unpredictable and perspective is skewed. Light begins to push detail forward- and then I am on my hands and knees, tracing individuations of frost over plant, the black peapods of wild indigo. I look up and blue begins to enter the sky.



HOW I WALK [explanation two] I pursue large distances, long tracks of time. I am feeling the ground beneath my feet and my attention is zooming in and out. Eventually, I let go of exterior boundaries (cold rain against skin becomes simply information.) As I walk, I am thinking of my cellular makeup, a steady flow of molecule from inside cell to out. I am phasing myself into the time it takes for the cloud to pass out of my vision. I am aware that I am accumulating, or becoming, different cycles of time. I am aware that I am moving, forward, into the future. My footprint stays behind but I do not consider it an archive; it does not contain any information about my passing through that particular

BODY TIME: the strike of the foot, the soft inhale/exhale pattern of breath, the swing of the arms in relation to the footfall.

LAND TIME: the cycle of traffic off to the left, the rise of the sun overhead, then behind me, the duration of a snowfall.

There is repetition built into this writing on walking. I write poetically and my walking practice has the potential to sound a bit like that as well. Of course there are moments of joy

moment, only that I did, and now I am no longer there. The footfall and immediately after, the footprint: I am looking towards the horizon, towards what is ahead, towards the space of the possible.

ABSENCE, NEGATION What is this delicate play of absence, negation? My presence is no longer, I am not intent on leaving anything behind. Nor am I intent on erasing presence. I am moving through place (a function of space) and I am moving through linear time and my footprint tells that I am doing just this. Absence is full of presence- I am not here, but I am somewhere else. And between being not here, and being somewhere else, lies distance.

...And I remember myself thinking: if 'negation' is derived from 'negative' the correct opposite form of 'positive' would be 'position.' CONSTANZE SCHELLOW

and frolic. More often, the walk is about commitment: plodding along, one foot in front of the other, while sweat rolls down the small of my back and a blister begin to form 7 miles out from home.

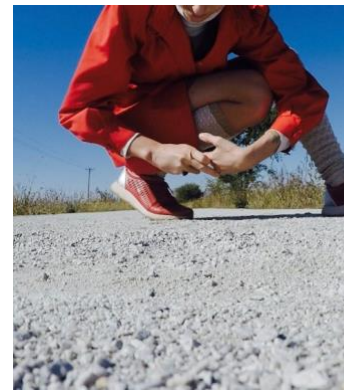


OTHER WALKERS + MULTIPILICITES OF TIME. I'm thinking of Francis Alÿs' walk through Stockholm, unraveling the blue yarn of his sweater, walking until the entire sweater is gone. An older woman began to follow him, re-raveling the string, for her own purposes. I

think of walking as a sharing of the string- raveling or unraveling. Walking is an invitation to join, to match another's stride for a while, to follow footprints through the snow- to share a cadence, a burden, a story. Walking is a shared experience while still keep attending to an individual experience of the moment unfolding. Walking is the way I orient myself in the world- I understand the pacing of my walk in relation to the woolly bear caterpillar inching along next to me. I understand my verticality next to the pylon looming. I understand my direction as straight towards east as I watch the hawk curve. My body (under the shelter of the last bus stop east of the city) in relation to the stranger standing next to me. (We will share a cigarette, talk about the weather, then our lives.)

MULTIPLICITIES OF TIME, the physical action of walking is the action, but is revealing something else- a focus on attention-committing and attuning to the moment at hand. I take this to the classroom, to the choreographic- improvisations, partnering and listening and vocalization scores practiced inside and outside, attuned to the shift of seasons, looking towards all that is tangible (the body, decaying materials, light, already existing pathways) to create scores + methodologies for being a fully present human mover. I take these thoughts to my duet practice with L. We do this thing, in our work: the patterns of walking, the slow crawling or running or singing or out of breath panting- simply shells for maneuvering through time, relationship, spatial patterns. The visible physical action is a vehicle for navigating all the strange and weird and tight spaces of the daily.

DANIELLE GOLDMAN



WALKING IN RELATION TO THE CHOREOGRAPHIES OF THE STUDIO. (OR, can the things I am doing with my walking be done without actually walking, without actually covering ground?) Once I was in Munich on a layover. I remember standing barefoot, at my hotel window, waiting for morning. There was a field out my window. And the window of the hotel room was quite large, so I had this beautifully framed dawn to witness. On the right side of the frame, a dog trotted into the field- a human trailed behind. Their locomotion- one a loping gallop, the other, a long stride that was bound to the effort of walking through snow- this is the first time I think I really understood how the verticality of a stride brings differentiation to the land. This figure- in a red coat- moving slowly, consistently, across my field of vision: each step was like time passing, was the beginning of separation of tree from ground from sky. Her action of walking

THIS QUESTION (In fact, the format for this entire writing) comes from a beautiful interview between Peter Eeley and visual artist + walker Helen Mirra, for the April- June 2011 issue of DIALOGUE. I've studied the series of questions Eeley offers to Mirra- I've never read Mirra's response.

through the framed field aligned with the break of day. After a while, she was gone. But with her absence, I saw the land, really saw what was in front of me: three trees, one foregrounded, branches spreading low and wide. The second 50 paces back, upright, marking center with verticality, the third distant and low. Then light entered the sky and saturated everything with blue. I was thinking of how Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* has the potential to take place daily. This is how the walk feels.

Gaston Bachelard writes about the shaping of a bird's nest as a *house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically*. The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. The bird, circles round again and again, pressing its breast to the walls, pressure from the inside out, forming the interior of the nest. Sticks and twigs of course are added from the outside, often by one parent, but the other stays focused on the formation of the interior. A bird's exact physical form *is* what makes place, nest, home.

I think about this often in spring, watching the red wing blackbirds appear on the prairie (first indicator species of spring!) then weeks later, as I walk the six and a half miles between Illinois towns, their red wings extend- swoop down at me, so defensive of the perimeter of home (radius fifteen feet?) I like their defensiveness; they know they have made something intimate and lifegiving and worth defending (chest pumping pressed to the interior of the nest). As I walk I look up and tell them I'm just passing through.

The walk is formed from the inside out, or a meeting of my interior with the exterior of the passing land. Thoughts and emptiness and cadence of footfall meeting earth meeting city and humans, the walk eventually becoming socialized action. This I desire in the choreographic, a making of place, a place that is dependent on the volume of my insides, inner pressure extending outwards. In Bachelard's words, I am working with a *physically dominate intimacy* to construct place.

I'm sure the things I'm doing with walking could be done without actually walking. I'm not interested in that.

WALKING TO CLARIFY HOME. I'm still not sure what home is. Much of my life has been about leaving spaces. I think home is a verb, home/ homing- always forming/ becoming. I find home in each rehearsal and class I teach. I have found home in the natural world: on the Illinois prairie, Central American fishing villages, coastal paths, old forests, bus stops sitting next to strangers who just want to be heard. Home is temporary, precarious, fragile. Homing demands curiosity and patience. I think of the small sand crabs that carry their homes on their back, clumsily searching for the next shell/ shelter. This is my search as well. And I do it sometimes clumsily, sometimes with grace, or wildness, exuberance- certain of my aliveness.



CODA Blue in the sky is a scattering of light that never reaches us. Robert Hass writes, *longing, we say, because desire is full of endless distances*. Some distances aren't wanting of closure. The pursuit of distance, both in the choreographic and in the walk is a passage of time, an accumulation of knowledge. I am measuring each stride, each moment a component of the work stepped through, breathed through. The distance that must be traveled to find out the whole is far, and we don't know the distances we have traveled until we have traveled them. Then we look back and see the place we were just standing, small and static in the distance. Then, a deep sigh in the body, a settling, turning back towards the blue of distance and setting forth again.

156. Why is the sky blue? A fair enough question, and one I have learned the answer to several times. Yet every time I try to explain it to someone or remember it to myself, it eludes me. Now I like to remember the question alone, as it reminds me that my mind is essentially a sieve, that I am mortal. MAGGIE NELSON

ALL PHOTOS SHOT WITH HOLGA, OR CRAPPY PHONE