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Turning 40: 40 Turns
Walking & Friendship

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Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god. – Aristotle

It is good to rely upon others. For no one can bear this life alone. – Hölderlin

There is no human relation that walking cannot promote: with whomsoever you would be friends, you must first do the things in which walking so conspicuously assists, that is, you must clear the brain of feathers and fireworks, settle the mind well back on itself, and link the present firmly on to the past. – A.H.Sidgwick

On December 3 2009, I turned 40. To mark the occasion, I decided to throw something of a peripatetic party and mailed 40 invitations to people I wanted to spend more time with, inviting them to take me on a walk of their choice. I have been celebrating walking and friendship since.

To date, my walks have taken me:

up Arthur's Seat, the Camel's Hump, Goat Fell and Beinn an Dothaidh;
into Richmond Park (by day time and by night time), an outside swimming pool and a cemetery;

along the Crinan Canal, the Forth and Clyde Canal, the Clyde River, the River Thames, the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, the Cumbria Coastal Path, Dunoon's Esplanade and Haussmann's Boulevards;
around Alloa, Exeter, the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, Godalming, Mugdock Country Park, the Vigeland Sculpture Park, Little Sparta, Ullswater, and Kilchrenan;
through the Tamar Valley, the South Tyne Valley, and the Paris Arcades.

I have walked with both old friends and new acquaintances. The age of my walkers has ranged from 3 years old to someone in their late seventies. I have been taken on favourite walks, familiar walks, new walks, desired walks, memorial walks, nostalgic walks, short walks and long walks.¹ *40 Walks* has depended entirely on the willingness, commitment and generosity of my invitees. My experience of these walks has prompted the tracking of relations between walking and friendship – or the art of companioning. Companion – *com pain* – with bread, breadfellows: the sharing of sustenance.²

Walking as a practice is historically determined – different times bring forth different modes, meanings and motivations.³ Distinctive discourses attached to walking were forged largely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as walking became a cultural choice rather than a necessity. A recurrent trope in published texts from this period is the performative potential – and benefit – of

¹ See <http://40walks.wordpress.com/>

² With thanks to Nicolas Whybrow for drawing my attention to the etymology of companion.

³ The signification of walking may be personal too, with its meaning and motivation differing throughout a life time. I doubt I would have thought to celebrate my 21st birthday with 21 walks.

walking to enact autonomy and freedom, with such properties frequently aligned with an imperative to walk alone.⁴ My intention here is not to deny the pleasures attached to walking alone; however, I do want to begin this exploration of walking and friendship by first exploring some of the assumptions of solitude, for even in supposed solitary walks there are multiple performances of companionship. 'Alone' is often, in fact, 'with'.

Essayist William Hazlitt, the first to write specifically about the pleasures of walking in his essay 'Going a Journey' (1822), is the solo walker's early spokesperson:

One of the pleasantest things in the world is going on a journey; but I like to go by myself (Hazlitt 1915: 45).

Hazlitt's chief objection to walking with others is that it provides the occasion for – and an expectation of – talking. If walking alone allows escape from 'the demands of human community' (Wallace 1993: 60), talking ties the walker to those demands. Framing walking as a means for reflection and contemplation (of sights, ideas and memories), Hazlitt presumes such occupations and pleasures debased or interrupted by the presence of others. Conversing contaminates traversing.

Hazlitt's essay also points towards the pressures of social etiquette and the cultural expectations of being in company (another tie to the demands of human community). Whilst 'when the moody fit comes on' you might choose to go off alone and 'indulge your reveries', he thinks this surely 'looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others' (Hazlitt 1915: 51). The likely guilt that

⁴ For the gendered implications of such discourses of the solitary – often combined with the epic – see Heddon and Turner (2012).

results erases the possibility of contemplation as the friends left behind intrude and interrupt nevertheless.⁵

Hazlitt is not alone in his nineteenth-century celebration of the solitary walker. Robert Louis Stevenson, responding to Hazlitt's essay in 'Walking Tours' (1876), similarly underscores the autonomy of the lone walker: the freedom to set one's direction and pace, unencumbered either by the speed of the 'champion walker' or the slowness of the 'mincing' girl. Citing Hazlitt's opinion of walking and talking: 'I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time', Stevenson adds

There should be no cackle of voices at your elbow, to jar on the meditative silence of the morning (Stevenson 1915: 6).

On the surface, commentaries by writers such as Hazlitt and Stevenson argue the benefits of solitary walking, seeing in companionship a denuding of the experience of reflection and a reduction of freedom. In practice, the binary between the solitary and the social is less secure. That so many 'autonomous' walkers position their arrival at an inn as a highlight is notable. For Stevenson, for example:

If the evening be fine and warm, there is nothing better in life than to lounge before the inn door in the sunset. [...] You fall in talk with any one, wise or foolish, drunk or sober. (Stevenson 1915: 12)

The pleasure of being alone is dependent on the knowledge that it is a temporary state, a practised dialectic of separation/conjoining.⁶

⁵ In another essay, Hazlitt attacked the rituals of social obligations, perceiving them to disguise authentic relations. See Hazlitt (1824).

⁶ Admittedly, the companionship found at an inn – or during the walk – a 'conversing-in-anonymity' (Robinson 2006: 58), can be both sociable and allow a sense of freedom and escape from who one is known as or expected to be.

Confirmed solitary walkers are also often accompanied by books.

Hazlitt takes Rousseau's *New Eloise* to read on a trip to Llangollen. Dorothy Wordsworth, in a letter to Jane Pollard (1791), makes the connection between reading and companionship explicit: 'I rise about six every morning, and, as I have no companion, walk with a book till half past eight, if the weather permits....' (Marples 1959: 88). Her letter also makes visible another puncturing of the seal of solitude; so often these nineteenth-century walkers communicate their walking experiences in letters or diaries, making connections either to others, or to other selves. Writing letters about a walk after a walk brings to the fore relations; but the foreknowledge of the anticipated letter writing perhaps also brings to presence and into space those imagined addressees. Similarly, nineteenth and early twentieth-century walking essayists, including those who write about the benefit of walking alone, write about it after the fact *for* a public audience.⁷

Werner Herzog's epic and mostly miserable walk from Munich to Paris, in the winter of 1974, offers a more recent example of the simultaneity of alone/with. In believing that by walking to Paris, to the hospital bedside of Lotte Eisner, he would keep her alive, Herzog's walk was a performance of commitment. Though alone, Herzog was connected mentally and emotionally to the person he was walking for and towards:

Tuesday 26 November

⁷ Paul Tankard points out that many of the essay series from the eighteenth century 'have names that imply being outdoors': *Lounger, Loiterer, Pilgrim, Monitor, Wanderer, Visitor, Citizen, Knight-Errant, By-Stander, Ranger, The Rambler, and Adventurer* (see Tankard 2008: 18). Tankard also notes that the essay's form – periodicity and occasionality – suggests a fit with walking: essays prompt 'reading at a walking pace' (ibid); they are less likely to be read in private than in public spaces (stations, trains, cafes, etc) – that is, 'between the usual locations for reading literature' (20).

[...] Lotte Eisner, how is she? Is she alive? Am I moving fast enough? I don't think so. The countryside's so empty, and has the same forsaken sense for me as during that time in Egypt. If I actually make it, no one will know what this journey means. Trucks drive by in dreary rain. Kirchberg – Hasberg – Loppenhausen, a place which needs no comment. (Herzog 2007: 14)

Marina Abramovic and Ulay's 'The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk' (1988) performs a different sort of testimony to love. Walking the Great Wall of China, but starting from separate ends in order to meet in the middle ninety days later, their meeting was planned to mark the end of their relationship; walking towards saying good-bye, rather than to being together. Herzog, Abramovic and Ulay seem to find a companionship *in* or *through* absence.

Walking alone one is, in any case, in communication with the self, whether in contemplative or reflective reverie. Herzog acknowledges this too:

I set off on the most direct route to Paris, in full faith, believing that [Eisner] would stay alive if I came on foot. Besides, I wanted to be alone with myself. (Herzog 2007, n.p.)

Walking alone enacts a doubling, as in Hazlitt's account of the solitary walker who is, nevertheless, 'noisily expressive' (Wallace 1993: 175): 'I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy' (Hazlitt 1915: 50). Leslie Stephen seems unconsciously to figure this paradoxical double when he writes of the 'peculiar charm in the solitary expedition when your interlocutor must be yourself' (Stephen 1911: 216). As Jeffrey Robinson proposes, walking provides space for self-thinking – there is room not only for associations but also dialogue, allowing one's

thinking to take ‘a step forward’ (Robinson 2006: 39). The Romantic walk (and the post-Romantic that follows in its footsteps) concerns the self, ‘its coalescence or its liberation’ (17). I might suggest that the walk is about *both* the self’s coalescence *and* liberation, the two connected. Hayden Lorimer and John Wylie suggest the same – nodding too to the ambiguity of the solitary walker: ‘When you’re walking “alone” it’s easier. [...] The landscape is a multiplicity of narratives and perceptions, and you can both lose and find yourself among this multitude’ (Lorimer and Wylie 2010: 7). One is in dialogue with the environment, here. Both landscape and self are in flux, engaged in a process of co-production (Heddon 2008; Lee and Ingold 2006: 73).

The first spokesperson of solitary walking actually closes his essay by recognising the value of walking *with* others in foreign places; when abroad, without hearing his own language spoken, Hazlitt claims that one can seem ‘a limb torn off from society’ (Hazlitt 1915: 60). Thus, though he may be physically alone, when in familiar landscapes Hazlitt nevertheless feels part of – connected to – his environment. Whilst ‘nature is company enough’, it is nature of a legible sort. This environment is filled with interpretable layers of social, cultural and historical meaning. Hazlitt is not as ‘free’ as he suggests; or, rather, it is the ease afforded by his ties to a familiar (domestic rather than foreign) cultural milieu that allows a sense of freedom *in or through* connection. Similarly, while essayist and walker Hilaire Belloc may propose that the greatest way of walking is walking away (Belloc 1911: 16), at the same time he writes that ‘a man walking becomes the cousin or brother of everything around’ (8).

Relations are as much sticky apparitions as they are materialities, and as such they travel with us, a reality captured poetically in Walt Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road', where in spite of his light-heartedness and freedom as he is led along the 'long brown path' (a metaphor for life's journey), still he carries his 'delicious burdens':

I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go [...]. (Whitman 1911: 143)

In any case, the reality of those early cultural walkers who praised walking alone is that they often literally walked in company. Thus Thoreau's rhetorical appeal for solitary walking, which demands the leave taking of all close relations, is promptly grounded immediately in his own experience, which reveals companionable walking: 'To come down to my own experience, my companion and I, for I sometimes have a companion, take pleasure in fancying ourselves knights of a new, or rather an old, order' (Thoreau 1911: 53).⁸ The essay continues to relate the experiences of 'we'. Hazlitt too often walked with companions; in addition to his well-known journeys with Coleridge, in 1822 he commenced a walking tour from Glasgow to the Highlands, accompanied by his friend Sheridan Knowles, and the following year in Hampshire with another friend, Peter George Patmore (Morris 1959: 54). Thus eighteenth and nineteenth-century discourses of solitary walking – which were anyway filled with companionship – are accompanied by more convivial stories: Johnson and Boswell, Wordsworth and Jones, Coleridge

⁸ Thanks to Carl Lavery for reminding me that the reference to 'knights' here brings to mind another – earlier – traveller, Don Quixote, and his companion, Sancho Panza.

and Hicks, Wordsworths and Coleridge, Keats and Brown, the Sunday Tramps, the Ramblers Associations...⁹

If walking alone prompts reflective reverie, what takes place in the companionable walk with a friend? What does friendship bring to walking? And what sorts of conditions for friendship does walking provide? Anthropologists Jo Lee and Tim Ingold profess walking as 'a particularly social kind of movement' (2006: 79), with the sociability of walking itself distinctive. Writing almost a century earlier, A.H. Sidgwick – though he thought 'proper' walking and 'proper' talking incompatible – similarly acknowledges that 'the process of walking and its environment tend to sociability'. The activity of walking 'lays a foundation of mutual respect', whilst the environment 'is familiar enough to create a sense of ease and yet strange enough to throw the walkers back on themselves with the instinct of human solidarity' (admittedly he has in mind a particular sort of walking in a particular sort of environment). The changing scenery provides interest, whilst the weather, lunch and necessity of divining the way 'all combine to surround the walkers with an atmosphere of sociability' (Sidgwick 1911: 147-8).

The intersection of space and movement allows for the particularity of walking's sociability. As Lee and Ingold note, walking together tends to result in a shared rhythm and pace – a settling into step that accommodates each participant. The physical proximity, as well as signalling a literal closeness, is

⁹ Having written about the invisibility of women in histories of walking practices (see Heddon and Turner, 2012), I cannot fail to notice their absence here too. Dorothy Wordsworth certainly walked with William and Coleridge, with Mrs Coleridge, and with other friends in the Lake District. She ascended Scafell in 1818, accompanied by Miss Barker. Ellen Weeton was another keen walker, sometimes walking in company. When walking was viewed as a necessity rather than a choice, working women would regularly walk together. Thus, the *Old Statistical Account* of the 1790s records that women would regularly walk many miles from port to city (see Mitchell 2001: 107).

directed towards a shared direction of travel, a common vista and field of vision: 'I see what you see as we go along together' (Lee and Ingold 2006: 80). In contrast to Georg Simmel's valorization of eye-to-eye (or face-to-face) contact, Lee and Ingold suggest the side-by-side as a less confrontational and more companionable model of communication.

The 'side-by-side' and the 'face-to-face' bring into view the philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy. Levinas' philosophical approach differs from Simmel's focus on actual modes of social interaction (in which he considers the eye fundamental to human communication). For Levinas, the 'face' is rather that which is not seen, that which cannot be reduced to a legible object or to signified content: 'The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes!' (Levinas: 1985, 85-86). For Levinas, the face-to-face encounter (where bodies face each other) issues a call; the others face – naked, vulnerable, exposed – signals its radical alterity (separation and difference) which summons and commands an irrefutable response/responsibility. The 'I' is bound to the 'Other', something of a 'hostage' to the other's imperative command.

The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse [...] The first word of the face is the "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. (87-89)

The other is absolutely Other to me, its otherness unknowable and irreducible. The irreducible gap between us prompts the desire for dialogue and reciprocity (if not its promise).

Where Levinas's 'face-to-face' encounter is structured on the principle – or question – of radical alterity, Jean-Luc Nancy focuses on the concept of plurality, as signalled in his tripartite, but unfixed, chain: being-singular-plural.¹⁰ For Nancy, selves exist not in relation (one to other), but 'together': 'Existence is *with*: otherwise nothing exists' (Nancy 2000: 4). This 'with' is the necessary space between us: 'The "between" is the stretching out and distance opened up by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning' (5). In this respect, the singular – and the singularity of being – is always already plural. Being is always already 'being-with' (30). Though everything is already in touch with everything, 'the law of touching is separation' (ibid.); singulars 'are "linked" insofar as they are not unified' (33). This is a joining *with* separation; presence depends on co-presence, a mutual exposure; 'we' is the condition for the appearance of the 'I' (65). Walking side-by-side perhaps conjures this being-singular-plural, for we walk together, apart (see also Lorimer and Wylie 2010: 7). As the etymology of traversing is to cross, walking perhaps offers a crossing between us – but the very fact of a crossing insists too on our separation.

A feature of the companionable walk is its collaborative, inter-active nature, an activity of mutuality. Whilst walkers might accommodate each other's pace, the ground accommodates particular forms or shapes of companionship, of being-together. There are walks that contain shared memories; walks that allow the sharing of one's memory with another; and walks that prompt resonances and contrast, likenesses and differences. The

¹⁰ It is relevant to this essay that Nancy begins his text, *Being Singular Plural*, with the quotation by the Romantic poet Hölderlin, reproduced at the start of this essay too.

physicality required by the walk – the walk’s materiality – also prompts certain forms of companionship. The path is wide enough to accommodate us, side-by-side; or its narrowness forces us to walk one behind the other – which usually prompts silence; or the incline is so steep that talking and breathing become laboured – but at the same time, the incline prompts regular, shared breaks – time taken to look back at the view, sometimes to share a warm flask of tea. Dorinda Hulton, reflecting on site-specific performance, usefully suggests that place proffers dramaturgical structure, for example, ‘a walk between two resting points becoming the dramatic equivalent of a suspensory pause’ (Hulton: 2007, 162). The shape of the walk directs the shape that bodies take in the landscape and the shape of the interactions, the relations between them.

Misha Myers has recently noted that walking *with* can encourage the co-production of knowledges precisely through the encounter that walking renders possible (see Myers, 2010). When the walking friends are artists, the collaboration implicit to companionable walking is further captured in collaboratively produced, artistic outputs. The seventeenth-century epic walk by Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō and his companion Sora, from Edo to the northern part of Honshu, is evocatively captured in narrative and poetic form in Bashō’s *The Narrow Road to Oku*. However, Bashō includes in this document not only autobiographical details of Sora, but also some of his poems ensuring his presence and contribution – to the walk and to the work – are visible. In Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn’s recent homage to Bashō and Sora’s, *The Road North* (2011), the collaboration of walk/work is again evident. Mapping the poets’ walk onto their journey that started in Edinburgh

and wound its way north through the Highlands of Scotland, they contribute in equal measure to en route activities and the emerging blog, the needs and skills of one, balancing the needs and skills of the other. Andrew Kotting's film *Gallivant* (1996) similarly shows the companionable walk that is irreducibly a collaborative work. Travelling some 6000 miles across Britain, with his eight-five-year-old grandmother Gladys and his seven-year-old daughter Eden (who has Joubert's syndrome), Kotting's film pays testimony to the relations between them, to the ways of being together that travelling allows.

As Claire MacDonald has stated, acknowledging the work of Michel Foucault and feminist scholars such as Marilyn Freedman, friendship provides a space outside of (patriarchal) institutions where collaboration can be developed, enabled by a practice of civility (rather than by legislative contracts) (MacDonald, 2010). Friendship is not an ordained, metaphysical relationship but one that becomes and endures through practice. There is, then, a *practice* to friendship, to companioning. Through walking, one *exercises* friendship, providing a grounding and a materialising.

Whilst walking *with* proffers a model of sociability, this is not to assume the absence of a potential strain attached to the 'with'. What is it to be a walking companion? What is it to 'do' walking companionably? In his early twentieth-century manual on walking, *Going Afoot: A Book on Walking*, Bayard Henderson Christy suggests that most of us prefer to walk in company but also advises that 'nothing is more important than the choice of companions' (1920: 37). Overlaying the activity of walking with companioning he conjures a strikingly appropriate metaphor: 'Daily, hourly intercourse rubs individuality upon individuality, till every oddity, every sensitive point, is worn

to the quick' (ibid.). One pictures, here, the friend becoming a blister – a rather different vision to Lee and Ingold's pleasing in-stepness of walking companions. Is there, however, a more generative aspect to the metaphorical (and sometimes literal) out-of-step? Companionable walks, if understood as collaborative practices, bring to the fore generous negotiation and the generation of ideas through association. Deleuze's comment on his co-authorship with Félix Guattari, and the sociability of ideas, proves helpful here. The work produced by Deleuze and Gaultari belonged to neither, but in-between (2007, 18).

We don't work, we negotiate. We were never in the same rhythm, *we were always out of step* [...] Neither union nor juxtaposition, but a broken line which shoots between two, proliferation, tentacles. [...] (ibid., 17; emphasis added)

For Guattari, conversation can be 'an outline of a becoming' (ibid., 2), ideas 'the encounter, the becoming [...], this "between-two" of solitude' (ibid., 9). In the "between-two" are also others, opening up the encounter, the becoming. Thus, in the 'and' between me and you there is 'neither a union nor a juxtaposition' but 'the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight' (ibid., 10). The value of two, in this respect, is greater than one. The line of flight travels away from heaven and towards the immanence of earth, upon which our feet stand, together but out-of-step.

Long-distance walking trips must put particular strain on friendship. Dancers Tamara Ashley and Simone Kenyon track something of this tension

in the document of their Pennine Way walk in 2006, *The Pennine Way: The Legs That Make Us* (2007). Amidst fragmented texts relating their experiences of their moving bodies walking through the shifting landscape are lines that mark the shifts in their relationship too.

We walk together, in close proximity and far apart. Emotional distances open, tiny cracks in a friendship. [...] I am entwined with the bravery and vulnerability of another. I am overwhelmed more often than I thought I would be. I overestimated my abilities. [...]

Day 18: Dufton – false start 2 miles. [...] After crossed words and crossed purposes at the tree, it all freezes. [...]

We are on the highest point of England and the lowest ebb of our friendship.

Day 21: Day 21: We follow the river- we are tied to one another, with rope, with patience running thin and friendship fraying (Ashley and Kenyon 2007: n.p.).

In reading Ashley's and Kenyon's document, I am reminded of MacDonald's poetics of artistic friendships: 'Friendship and weathering. Just that. Weathering it' (MacDonald 2010: n.p). Charles Stivale also reminds us, after Deleuze, that friendship is 'not one single type of practice', but an active relationship that allows both affirmation and dissent, harmony and disharmony (Stivale 2008: ix). Reflected in the experiences of walking companions is the dynamism of friendship. Friendship, a voluntary, unlegislated relationship, one that cannot be demanded or willed, exists in a state of flux, of becoming (which includes ending), rather than a static given. Its voluntariness, as

Sandra Lynch recognises, 'opens relations between friends to creative constructions' and 'uncertainty' (Lynch 2005: ix). The connection between friends is 'an intersubjectively created and cultivated synthesis' (ibid., 188), 'a creative enterprise' rather than an illusory, unaccountable union (ibid., 194). In the voluntariness of friendship there resides something of the 'gift'; friendship as an act of heterogeneous generosity, which is 'associated with shifting roles, spontaneity, desire, loss and risk' (Nicholson: 2005, 193). Such creative – artful – enterprise is perhaps another instance of Nancy's together-apart and Deleuze's between-the-two. Perceived in this way, walking – as much as it allows the solitary walker to cultivate a self – provides creative ground for the collaborative cultivation of friendscapes

40 Turns

On December 3 2009, I turned 40. To mark the occasion, I decided to throw something of a peripatetic party and mailed 40 invitations to people I wanted to spend more time with, inviting them to take me on a walk of their choice. I have been celebrating walking and friendship since.

Every walk is different, individual, unpredictable and, in its own way, riskful. Each of my invitees bothers to share with me their dilemmas and anxieties of where to walk. Every walk has been specifically chosen *for* me to be given specifically *by* them (see Fenell, 2002). Walks thought to be not quite right are discarded. This is walking as gifting. Taken on autotopographical walks, where the personal and the topographical are inseparable, landscapes sculpted by personal experience are shared with me (see Heddon 2008), offering perspective from another's viewpoint. Simon takes me to the South

Tyne Valley, where he used to live in the early 70s. Stopping beside a brown river, watching a trout jump high in the air, he shares another slice of his life, this one from the 1980s, when he visited this exact spot with a men's consciousness-raising group. I relish what this memory tells me about Simon, this glimpse offered into another life, but one that still connects to the person standing beside me. Simon is a recent friend, and this walk has confirmed our in-step-ness, our becoming friends.

I walk with my dad around the town of Alloa, the place of his birth, and I wonder that I have never been here before. We retrace the steps to the house he grew up in, which he tells me looks exactly the same – except for the tree in the garden which is much bigger. He planted it as a seedling when he was 17 years old, just before he left home to join the Forestry Commission. We walk through the woods below where his secondary school stood and then sit on a bench, where he tells me this is just where he sat, 50 years earlier. Having received his Higher examination results, he came here to contemplate his future, the options now opening up, the choices to be made. I picture him, perhaps for the first time, as young, excited, uncertain, on the brink of adulthood, and ask him what he'd say to that younger self: 'I'd say you didn't do at all badly, not bad at all'.

Walking, then, has conjured versions of selves I have not yet encountered. It has also ushered in other types of ghosts too as we follow in the footsteps – or walk beside – those who were here before us: the and between me and you. Dorinda had intended that we would walk with her father, Vincent, but before the date arrives, Vincent dies. And so we walk Vincent's walk instead, retracing the route they always took when Dorinda

visited, she pushing him in his wheelchair through the main street, into the church, down to the band stand and the Philips Memorial Garden, along the river and under the Weeping Willows – a challenge to navigate with a wheelchair Dorinda tells me. On our walk, I learn about Vincent and his Burmese wife, Ma Saw Tin (Dorinda's mum). In 1942, the year they married, they walked some 300 miles out of Burma, displaced by the war. On their long walk Vincent and Ma Saw Tin unavoidably passed the dead and the dying. Vincent had enough sense to wear the boots of a man who no longer had any need of them.

My walk with Peter retraces a walk taken in the summer of 1890 by his one-legged Great Grandfather, John Thomson, from Glasgow. Peter has in his possession a letter written by John to his son Hugh, dated 18 August 1890. Telling of an enjoyable day trip 'doon the water', the letter's narrative provides the plot for our walk, from Kilcreggan to Rosneath. This is a pilgrimage Peter has been long keen to make and for the occasion, he carries with him John's walking stick, the silver inscription atop the smooth bone handle revealing it as a gift from John's Sabbath Class. As the stick touches the ground, we imagine it reconnecting with its history.

Walking with friends not seen for a while, the reemerging of paths has allowed me to catch up with and marvel at who they have become. I walk with Nicola in Paris, and with her two year old son, Thomas, whom I meet for the first time. As we walk the boulevards, Nicola points out the places that have become anchors in her orientation (the favourite patisserie, the vegan café, the canal path, Haussmann's Romantic Parc Des Buttes Chaumont. Nicola

has become a mum, is becoming Parisian, is settling comfortably into a new place, walking herself home.

In my walking encounters my self is extended too. Borrowing again from Claire MacDonald, friendship is 'a method of making that encourages us to be more than ourselves' (2010, n.p.). This 'more than' takes on a pragmatic hue: Mike teaches me more about birds; Jan about canal boat etiquette; Carl about the French Revolution and Saint Just; Gerry about the menopause (which no-one ever seems to talk about); Rebecca and Andrew about the difference between taking a wrong turn and getting lost. My walk with three year old Eloise teaches me to remember the pleasures of shape shifting, of becoming other. As she becomes Tito, a magical terrier dog, so I become Space Rocket, then a vampire, then an eagle, and finally Scooby Doo. Walking and improvising, walking and friendship, making it up as we go along.

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