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Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility

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The art of walking has become a significant mode of practice and subject of critique in recent years. Festivals, events, networks and publications attest to the popularity of walking as art, including Will Self's *Psychogeography* and *Psycho Too*, Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography*, Roberta Mock's edited anthology, *Walking, Writing and Performance*, Phil Smith's *Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways*, Geoff Nicholson's populist *The Lost Art of Walking*, AntiFestival's Walking festival, Deveron Art's Walking Festival, Plymouth's *Perambulations* and the Walking Artists Network.¹

Reviewing contemporary writings about and reflections on current walking practices, we have found that this practical and critical interest in walking is cast in a much longer history. In this essay we first of all suggest that earlier theories and interpretations of walking continue to exert influence on cultural understandings of aestheticized walking, informing and shaping current knowledge. We argue that the reiteration of a particular genealogy – or fraternity – which includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, Andre´ Breton and Guy Debord generates an orthodoxy of walking, tending towards an implicitly masculinist ideology. This frequently frames and valorizes walking as individualist, heroic, epic and transgressive. Such qualities are not exclusive to men of course; however, as we go on to suggest, a lack of attention to gender serves to fix the terms of debate, so that qualities such as 'heroism' and 'transgression' are understood predominantly in relation to a historically masculinist set of norms. It is our proposition that a persistent iteration of these features marginalizes other types of walking practices and the insights they might prompt, a marginalization that this essay seeks to address.

The invisibility of women in what appears as a canon of walking is conspicuous; where they are included, it is often as an 'exception' to an unstated norm, represented by a single chapter in a book or even a footnote. Coverley's populist *Psychogeography* proves illustrative. Treading a path through urban pedestrianism from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, he introduces the reader to Daniel Defoe, William Blake, Thomas De Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Machen, Alfred Watkins, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Andre´ Breton, Louis Aragon, Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau, J. G. Ballard, Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd, Stewart Home and Patrick Keiller.² The only woman represented in the entire book is the eponymous prostitute of Surrealist Breton's *Nadja* (herself a re-presentation of a woman stalked through the night time streets of Paris).³

¹ Will Self, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007); Will Self, *Psycho Too* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009); Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006); *Walking, Writing and Performance*, ed. by Roberta Mock (Bristol: Intellect, 2009); Phil Smith, *Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways* (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2010); Geoff Nicholson, *The Lost Art of Walking* (Chelmsford, Harbour Books, 2010); Kuopio AntiFestival, [www. antifestival.com](http://www.antifestival.com) [accessed 31 January 2012]; Deveron Arts www.deveronarts.com [accessed 31 January 2012]; Walking Artists Network, [http:// walkingartistsnetwork.org/](http://walkingartistsnetwork.org/) [accessed 2 February 2012]. *Perambulations* was part of the Hidden City Festival held in Plymouth 2008 [www. hiddencityfestival.org.uk](http://www.hiddencityfestival.org.uk) [accessed 12 April 2012].

² Coverley, *Psychogeography*.

³ Andre´ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. M. Polizzotti (London: Penguin Books, 1999 [1928]).

While this particularly male-centred chronology may be an extreme example, it seems to represent a general trend.⁴ It is this surprising absence of women and the persistent cultural and ideological narratives attached to walking – the former connected to the latter – that has prompted our research project, ‘Walking Women’. Having established, with relative ease, that many contemporary women artists use walking as an integral material to their art, during 2009 we walked with and talked to thirteen artists based in the UK, discussing in some detail their practices, motivations, and experiences, including their sense of walking as a woman.⁵

Our project always and consciously treads a difficult line between the risk of essentialism and that of understating the real differences in experience that may be produced by cultural expectations of gender performance. We do not seek to identify a way of walking specific to women; given that there is no singular ‘woman’, there can be no such practice. Nevertheless, we do recognize that the body that walks potentially makes a difference to the experience of walking. As geographer Tim Cresswell writes, ‘ways of moving have quite specific characteristics depending on who is moving and the social and cultural space that is being moved through’.⁶ Here, we set out to ask whether women’s work, itself under-represented, might draw attention to invisible, under-estimated or unexamined aspects of walking performances, thus serving to challenge the dominant discourses that remain attached to walking practice. We argue that setting the work we have encountered thus far beside persistent narratives of walking prompts a necessary and renewed attention to the relative and contextual – mobile – nature of concepts of freedom, heroism and scale, on the one hand, and to the relational politics that make up the spatial on the other.

Walk Like A Man . . .

Before introducing practices which variously trouble our perceptions of scale, we must first expand on our opening suggestions concerning the predominant and influential narratives attached to walking. The represented landscape of walking as an aesthetic practice is framed by two enduring historical discourses: the Romantics and Naturalists, tramping through rural locations; and the avant-gardists, drifting through the spectacular urban streets of capitalism. Irrespective of historical or geographical location, two related imperatives recur: seek out adventure, danger and the new; and

⁴ For instance, Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) references specific male walkers approximately four times as frequently as it identifies female walkers, despite her consciousness of questions of gender, feminism and the history of prostitution. The list of men to whom she devotes most space bears some similarity to Coverley’s genealogy, and to the lineage we suggest in our opening remarks: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Muir, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Thomas De Quincey, Charles Dickens, Charles Baudelaire, Søren Kierkegaard, Walter Benjamin, André Breton, Louis Aragon, Guy Debord. The only women given comparable space are Jane Austen, Dorothy Wordsworth, Virginia Woolf and Ffiona Campbell.

⁵ ‘Women Walking’ was funded by the British Academy. We completed peripatetic interviews with Emma Bush, Hilary Ramsden, walkwalkwalk, Tamara Ashley and Simone Kenyon, Elspeth Owen, Rachel Gomme, Linda Cracknell, Sorrel Muggridge, Misha Myers, and Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre.

⁶ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), p. 197. The recent statement by a representative of Toronto Police that ‘women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized’ is a stark indication of the ways in which the occupation of space remains gendered. Responding to such patriarchal ideology, the ‘Slut Walk’ was founded by four women in Toronto. At the time of writing, satellite Slut Walks have been proposed in Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, South Africa and Mexico. See <http://www.slutwalktoronto.com/4> [accessed 1 September 2011].

release oneself from the relations of everyday life. While both discourses tend to presume a universal walker, whose experience is uninflected by gender, explicitly and implicitly the walker is typically male.

Rousseau's late-eighteenth-century assertion that he could only meditate when walking is much cited as a founding moment in the history of walking understood as a cultural act, as a means in itself.⁷ It is not walking, per se, that enables Rousseau's deep contemplation but the sense of freedom engendered by walking alone. Walking serves to erase 'everything that makes me feel my dependence, [. . .] everything that recalls me to my situation'.⁸ The specificity of the body that is able to walk alone in the eighteenth century is worth remarking.

Henry David Thoreau, writing a century later, figures the walker as a crusader and errant knight, traversing the wild; as such, the domesticated walk is critiqued: 'When we walk we naturally go to the fields and woods; what would become of us if we walked in a garden or mall?'⁹ In his treatise, the independent walker is explicitly coded as male:

If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again; if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk.¹⁰

This might be dismissed as belonging to nineteenth-century chauvinism, and yet contemporary artists acknowledge a debt to such past walkers. For instance, Wrights & Sites cite Thoreau's words in their 'Manifesto for a New Walking Culture'¹¹ with a modicum of approval. This is despite the fact that all members of this mixed gendered group are frequently involved in walking with children, partners and friends.

Wrights & Sites also take a bearing from the avant-garde tradition of the twentieth century, citing in the same Manifesto André Breton's command to 'Leave everything' – including Dada, wife, mistress, children and 'easy life'.¹² While their citation of manifesto-within-manifesto offers multiple viewpoints by which to engage such statements, something of this longing to be 'a free man' appears to remain. Though Thoreau and Breton are not expected to be taken literally, their words are associated with a political freedom that is desirable. This construction of walking as an act of heroic resistance to norms reappears in the postmodern figure of the rhizomatic nomad, pitted

⁷ See Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 14; and Joseph A. Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 110–11.

⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953 [1782]), p. 382.

⁹ Henry David Thoreau, 'Walking', in Waldo R. Browne (ed.), *Joys of the Road: A Little Anthology in Praise of Walking* (Chicago: Browne's Bookstore, 1951), pp. 56–75 (p. 64); originally published in *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1862.

¹⁰ Thoreau, 'Walking', pp. 57–58.

¹¹ Wrights & Sites, 'Manifesto for a New Walking Culture: Dealing with the City', *Performance Research*, 11 (2006), 115–122. Also available at <http://www.misguide.com/ws/documents/dealing.html> [accessed 26 May 2011]. Wrights & Sites, founded in 1997, is a group of four artist-researchers (Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, Phil Smith and Cathy Turner) committed to producing experimental, siteorientated work. See <http://www.misguide.com/4> [accessed 2 February 2012].

¹² André Breton, 'Leave Everything', in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978 [1922]), p. 166.

against the State and stasis.¹³ As Cresswell notes, this nomad 'is a remarkably unsocial being – unmarked by the traces of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and geography'.¹⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud's idea of the 'radicant' artist is close to this Deleuzian conception: such art is characterized by 'wandering practices' and journey-structures, refusing stable identity or location, introducing 'precariousness into the very heart of the system of representations by means of which the powers that be manage'.¹⁵ Despite Bourriaud's claims to 'altermodernity', we hear echoes of Rousseau and Thoreau in his celebration of 'a principle of nonmembership: that which is constantly moving from place to place, which weakens origins or destroys them', where the artist journeys through a 'new altermodern archipelago'.¹⁶

A parallel legacy is revealed in the popularization of the term 'psychogeography', which is testament to a continuing debt to the practices of the anarchic Situationist International (SI), founded in Paris in the late 1950s, who shared with the Romantics the same notions of 'adventure', 'newness' and 'freedom'. The artist, set apart from the crowd, aims to shock us out of our commonplace perceptions into a revaluation of the everyday, reality itself. Of all the movements engaged in reflexive walking practice, the SI would seem to hold out the most promise for an awareness of embodied experiences of space, the very term 'psychogeography' alluding to the subjective combined with the scientific. However, situationist renderings of space, though complex, seem to fix it, as if space exists separate to its occupations. For example, founder Guy Debord asked that those committed to one SI tactic, the *dérive*, 'drop [. . .] their relations [. . .] and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there'.¹⁷ There is a presumption that 'letting-go' engenders access to some pure space. And yet, how can one abandon one's relations, if the concept of 'relations' extends to the diffuse, culturally inscribed relations that exist between all people – and indeed the relations through which space is constructed? That relations (albeit multiple and shifting) are attached to bodies and travel with them, affecting space, is made blatant in the experiences of SI member Abdelhafid Khatib. In the summer of 1958, whilst attempting to produce a psychogeographical report for the SI on the Les Halles area, Khatib was twice arrested for breaking the curfew imposed on Algerian residents (which prohibited them from being outside after 7.30pm).¹⁸ Such incidents rather question Simon Sadler's proposition that Bernstein and Khatib

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are key critics here. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 53.

¹⁵ See Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, trans. James Gussen and Lili Porten (New York: Lukas and Sternberg 2009), pp. 94, 99. It would be possible to extend this discussion by looking at Bourriaud's notion of 'relational art' and its aspirations, as well as Grant Kester's related concept of 'dialogic' practices (see *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)). Such an analysis deserves more space, however, and a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this article, though see our comments below.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.185.

¹⁷ Guy Debord, 'Theorie de la derive', *Internationale Situationniste*, #2 (Paris, December 1958) ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb in *Situationist International Anthology*, (2nd Edition, 2006) pp. 62–66 available to download at www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm4 [accessed 30 November 2010].

¹⁸ Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Stirling: A.K. Press, 1991), p. 34.

could use the psychogeographic drift to 'reclaim the night' and momentarily defy 'the white patriarchy of urban-space time'.¹⁹

Iain Sinclair, associated with the recent resurgence of psychogeography, describes his own discovery of walking as 'a means of editing a city of free-floating fragments'. Rather than being directly influenced by the Situationists, he comments that he recognized that he had been a 'disenfranchised psychogeographer' all along. He characterizes himself as stalking 'a defining urban narrative', and this idea of the walk as cinematographic narrative of images became 'a model for future projects'.²⁰ Sinclair's vision of psychogeography again echoes the need for detachment and proposes the possibility of being able to read the city as a text, looking 'down on the glittering Thames', without much concern for the specificity of one's own body and cultural position. Psychogeography's pitching of the individual against a monumentalized and static space is an opposition echoed in the often-quoted writings of philosopher Michel de Certeau. His suggestion that the city is a language to be spoken by the walker is resonant in relation to Sinclair's notions of editing and narrating a city.²¹ Doreen Massey, however, rejects this notion of space, understanding it instead as a 'sphere of relations'. She thus calls for a 'relational politics of the spatial', concerned with the multiple 'engagements' with which space 'challenges us' and which emphasizes our implication in the construction of spatial relationships.²² Following Massey, we might suggest that the detachment implicit in Romanticism, Naturalism and avant-garde practices (and after them, contemporary psychogeography) refuses to recognize or take any responsibility for its implication in the construction of asymmetrical spatial power relations.²³

The historic and contemporary landscapes of psychogeographical practices are mostly devoid of women.²⁴ The fiction produced by one of the few female situationist members, Michele Bernstein, while unreliable as a historical source,²⁵ offers a rare insight into her imaginative response to the situationist derive. In *Toutes les Chevaux du Roi (All the King's Horses)* the character Geneviève (based on Bernstein), is the long-term partner of Gilles (based on Debord).²⁶ In describing her attempts to walk alone in Nice, Geneviève comments on the unwelcome attention she attracts as a woman alone, finding it all 'rather sad and discouraging'.²⁷ Bernstein evokes the way that the solitary female walker may be made painfully aware of her own body as spectacle. She does not experience the city as 'a free man'. Perhaps, however, her experience of having her own identity reflected back to her by the city makes her acutely aware of the constitution of space as a constant, ongoing activity in which bodies are active and implicated. Geneviève also suggests that hers is a more circumscribed Paris than that of her partner: 'Alone [. . .] the streets [. . .] always lead me to

¹⁹ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 81.

²⁰ Iain Sinclair, 'An Introduction to Lights Out for the Territory', *Telegraph*, 1 February 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/ expat/ expatlife/ 7140533/LightsOut-for-theTerritory.html> [accessed 27 May 2011].

²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²² Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 147.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴ See Coverley, *Psychogeography*.

²⁵ Bernstein's writing in *Tous les Chevaux du Roi* is unreliable because of its fictional nature; its status as an historical record of Situationist activities is therefore unclear. However, it is evidently based on Bernstein's personal situation and Situationist practices.

²⁶ Bernstein was married to Debord.

²⁷ Michele Bernstein, *Tous les Chevaux du Roi* (Buchen-Chastel, 1960; trans. John Kelsey as *All the King's Horses* (Paris: Semiotext(e), 2008)), p. 65.

the same parts of the city [. . .]. For me, the Left Bank consists of a few cafe' tables.'²⁸ Accepting the excitement of a night walk that might 'reinvent Paris', she does not suggest that her own, more constrained perspective might itself prove revealing, an idea that we propose remains a further possibility.

Walking As A Woman . . .

In her fiction, Bernstein reveals something of what it is to walk as a woman in 1960s Paris.²⁹ She locates her gendered self within the landscape – her experience as a woman standing in stark contrast to the masculinist presumptions so often iterated within the historical and contemporary explications of walking art. These presumptions, alongside a noticeable invisibility of women in publications about walking art, prompted our exploration of the work of female artists. The space available here does not permit a deep analysis of individual performances – though that is certainly a task our initial findings suggest is necessary. Rather, in the remainder of this article we seek to introduce the various ways in which this work offers possibilities for – and suggests the necessity of – revising and widening the discourses attached to walking, challenging critical orthodoxies. If our original intention was to bring women's work into the frame of reference, pointers within the work indicate that the frame itself might be productively unsettled.

The spectacular reception that Bernstein encountered as a walking woman remains reflected in more contemporary experiences, suggesting the need for further research on the 'reception' of walking bodies. Two of the women artists we interviewed, Simone Kenyon and Tamara Ashley, walked the long-distance Northern England route, the Pennine Way, in 2007. Framing their walk as a durational art project, for the 429 kilometres traversed over 31 days they attempted to stay attuned to the way the changing landscape made their (trained, dancers') bodies feel; and to the fact that they walked as a duo.³⁰

The artists' intention was to walk the path as dancers, noting relationships between space and movement and each other. Notably, certain acts of spectatorial inscription brought other relations into the foreground, making Ashley and Kenyon at times acutely conscious of their gender – of walking as women. Interpellated by the occasionally hostile male walker/spectator as lesbians (intended as an insult), Ashley and Kenyon were exposed to – and in their reflections revealed – the persistence of certain ideological assumptions about appropriate places for women to walk, alongside appropriate types of walking for women.

For this reason, we would propose that women's 'heroic walking' – walking that takes place on long-durational and geographical scale – is performative, claiming equal right for women to traverse the 'wild', the open spaces. However, the 'heroic' attributes might also resonate doubly here, since the

²⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁹ Cited in Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 52.

³⁰ Unpublished interview with Heddon (2009). Tamara Ashley and Simone Kenyon are dancers committed to creating work that engages with aspects of ecology and environment. They have created solo pieces and collaborative performances. At time of writing, Ashley is Artistic Director of DanceDigital whilst Kenyon is a producer with Battersea Arts Centre. The Pennine Way walk was blogged: [http:// ashleykenyonwalk.blogspot.com](http://ashleykenyonwalk.blogspot.com) [accessed 15 July 2011]. An illustrated book was subsequently published, offering a poetic and diaristic reflection of their experiences – *The Pennine Way: The Legs That Make Us* (London A Brief Magnetics Publication, 2007). The dancers presented a performative account of their walk at RADAR, Loughborough University ('Roam: A Weekend of Walking'), 15–17 March 2008.

perceived risks of the 'wild' are gendered; part of the assumed threat for women is generated by still-dominant cultural perceptions of the implicit threat of men; this is the 'wild man' who, unable to control his sexual urges, preys on (vulnerable) women.³¹ Ashley and Kenyon's work prompts us to ask the difficult question of whether women who walk in the 'wild' are considered especially heroic; difficult, because an affirmative answer reiterates cultural presumptions about gender (in opposition to the 'wild man' is the vulnerable, victimized and incapable woman).

The differently gendered presumptions attached to the wild are explicit in the experience of writer Linda Cracknell. During 2007, supported by a Creative Scotland Award, Cracknell undertook a dozen walks to gather material for a writing project, completing a variety of excursions which included a 200 mile Scottish drover's road and a seven day hike on the Mozarabic trail in south-eastern Spain.³² Cracknell recalls a phrase she heard repeatedly throughout her project: 'God, you must be so brave.' Significantly, she did not hear this when she climbed an Alp – the only walk that, in her opinion, exposed her to real, objective danger.³³ On this walk, though, she was accompanied by two men.

Rather than suggesting a greater scale of heroism for the female walker, it may well be more useful politically to draw attention to the many women who do undertake walking on this scale and emerge unscathed. This might generate reassurance that the wild is neither more nor less dangerous to women than it is to men, which in turn may serve to rewrite the inscriptions of space and gender, as well as presumed walking competencies.

Walking Women, Troubling Scales

We must, however, go beyond simply asserting that women, too, walk in difficult and remote places and consider whether their work troubles our conventional understanding of 'heroic' walking. Though recognizing the political imperative of acknowledging women artists' presence in the 'wild' (women have always been as attracted to 'risk' or 'adventure' as men), at the same time we wish to resist simply adding women to a landscape from which they have been absented. To do so would leave other norms unchallenged. In exploring the work made, and in listening to artists' reflections upon it, it is evident that values of scale are problematized rather than simply inverted; the mobility and relationality of scales are exposed. For example, though Ashley and Kenyon have walked the Pennine Way, they also point out that on the long durational journey, walking becomes underscored as a repetitive and familiar action – simply one foot after another. The next move is defined. As they state, the long-distance path provided them with a long-term purpose and focus, a choreographic or action-score that guided and pulled them along each day. In this way, Ashley and Kenyon represent the epic and heroic as in-step and co-incidental with the habitual and the known.

³¹ As Rebecca Solnit writes, 'Having met so many predators, I learned to think like prey', *Wanderlust*, p. 168.

³² Linda Cracknell is the author of collections of stories including *Life Drawing* (Glasgow: 11/9, 2000), edited anthologies (*A Wilder Vein* (Ullapool: Two Ravens Press, 2009)), and radio plays (including *The Lamp*, R4, December 2011). Her walks from 2007 are informing a series being published in Cracknell's pocket book imprint, 'best foot books' which includes *Whiter than White* (2009), *The Beat of Heart Stones* (2010) and *Following Our Fathers* (2012). See <http://www.lindacracknell.com> [accessed 2 February 2012] and <http://walkingandwriting.blogspot.com> [accessed 25 May 2011].

³³ Unpublished interview with Heddon (2009).

Similarly, though Cracknell completed a number of long distance walks, she also walked the everyday paths of a Kenyan village, and the Birks of Aberfeldy – a short daily walk behind her home. Contrasting with the narratives of discovery that are attached to the new and unfamiliar, she reflects that this walk is ‘like the process of revision’.³⁴ It is through rewalking, like rewriting, that original stories emerge. Each of Cracknell’s walks has an equally valuable story to tell no matter their status as familiar or unfamiliar, or their scale of distance covered. Further, irrespective of where Cracknell is walking, her attention is drawn to the details of the micro-landscape nestling close by; for example, encountering a rock with scratch marks on it she imagined it as a vast landscape unto itself. Such microscopic attention makes the smallest landscape gigantic. Attending to detail in this way again equalizes walking practices as the focus is the nearby – not the distant horizon (an open space to be conquered). Wherever one is walking, one is right here, on this foot of land.

Artist Elspeth Owen’s walking events similarly trouble assumptions of scale. Undertaking long-distance, long-duration projects, Owen typically walks for hundreds of miles throughout the UK, rarely knowing, in advance, where she is going. This unpredictability is built into the structure of her works. In *Looselink* (2005), for example, she invited ten people – all but the first a stranger to her – to present her with a message to be hand-delivered to another person. The recipient of that message would then be invited to give her another message to deliver to another person, and so on. In this way, Owen criss-crossed Britain, walking from her home in Cambridgeshire, to Newcastle, to South Wales, to Norfolk, and finishing some three months later in Cornwall. Her walking served to create a network of eleven people.³⁵

Whilst Owen is undeniably engaging with the epic, she simultaneously challenges notions of the heroic, solitary walker by inserting a gesture of intimacy into her work, becoming a ‘link’ between people. Her inordinately personal touch reduces the epic to a local scale – one human to one human: one sender, one messenger, one recipient. This simple gesture serves to remind us that, irrespective of distances between, we are connected to each other. But here lies the paradox of her work too, because it is the distances between, the effort required to cover them, that lends her work its impact, making the gesture of delivery profoundly committed rather than banal. The small scale gesture (the detail) depends on, is entangled with, the large scale action (the monumental).³⁶

It would be disingenuous not to admit to a sense of admiration and awe in the face of Owen’s practice, even if that comes dangerously close to patronizing; Owen is in her seventies. Resisting this idea of heroism, however, she is adamant that her walking is not in any way related to endurance or suffering. She willingly accepts the kindness of strangers when offered (spare rooms and hospitality) and admits to carrying a large golfing umbrella tucked into her rucksack (useful for shelter, to scare cattle, and as a walking stick). There seems an everyday pragmatism to Owen’s practice that deflates overblown concepts of the heroic – the single walker pitched against the enormity of the open lands – rescaling it in the process. Owen is simply going for a walk.

³⁴ Unpublished interview with Heddon (2009).

³⁵ Though an established ceramicist, Elspeth Owen also embraces time-based, live practices. Since 2005, under the guise of a persona, ‘Material Woman’, Owen has completed a number of long-distance, durational walks: *Looselink* (2005), *Orbit* (2007), *Grandmother’s Footsteps* (2009) and *In the Dark* (2009). See www.elspethowen.net [accessed 1 May 2012].

³⁶ See Rebecca Schneider, ‘Patricide and the Passerby’, in D. J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr and Kim Solga (eds), *Performance and the City* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 51–70.

Women Walking . . . 'The Familiar And Forgotten'

Whilst artists such as Kenyon, Ashley, Cracknell and Owen simultaneously engage and trouble conceptions of the 'heroic', other artists consciously locate their practice in their local vicinity, but here too they problematize categories. In spite of a notable cultural shift towards valuing the local (largely prompted by environmental sensitivity and appeals to sustainability), the 'local' remains tainted with notions of the parochial (a place of borders and boredom), marked by the same cultural conceptions that enabled Thoreau to frame his 'wilderness' walks as more valuable than walks around a landscaped garden.

Perceptions of 'local' and 'wild' seem related to rhetoric of scale. Susan Stewart notes in her study of the miniature and the gigantic that the miniature is overcoded as the 'cultural', whilst the gigantic is overcoded as the 'natural': 'Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural'.³⁷ Such codings, like those attached to mobility (mobile/immobile, active/passive), are ideologically gendered and whilst both scales are equally overcoded, they are differentially valued. The small scale comes to represent the constraints of culture, rather than its achievements, while the large scale aligns public man with the unmediated vibrancy of the natural world.

The devaluing of the 'local' is strikingly evident in Debord's 'Theory of the Dérive', where he quotes a study of Paris by Chombart de Lauwe. De Lauwe illustrates the 'narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives' by systematically plotting the movements of a student over the course of a year. As Debord represents it: 'Her itinerary forms a small triangle with no significant deviations, the three apexes of which are the School of Political Sciences, her residence and that of her piano teacher.'³⁸ Debord goes on to profess 'outrage at the fact that anyone's life can be so pathetically limited', a limitation to be overcome by the development of the *dérive*.³⁹

The limits of Debord's own perspective are apparent within the work of many contemporary artists who value the local and habitual, while other work makes evident the ways in which specific roles and bodies shape the geographies of our lives. For example, partners Dan Belasco Rogers and Sophia New of plan b, based in Berlin, have both recorded their every journey on GPS since 2007 (Belasco Rogers had done so since 2003).⁴⁰ The resulting project, *You, Me and Everywhere We Go*,⁴¹ a visual exhibition of these recordings, offers unique data concerning not only their habitual, everyday walking practices (the repeated routes appear as thicker markings on the printed GPS recordings), but the differences between their movements while collaborating as artists, partners and parents. Though the broad picture appears similar to the outsider, there are moments of telling disjunction,

³⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 70.

³⁸ Debord, 'Theory of the Derive' unpaginated.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Daniel Belasco Rogers and Sophia New have been performing together under the name plan b since 2001. Residing in Berlin, they make solo and individual works, across a range of forms, including video installation, drawings, and performance. Since 2003, Belasco Rogers has been recording his outside journeys with a GPS (The Drawing of My Life). In 2007, New began to record her movements. See <http://planbperformance/net> [accessed 21 May 2011].

⁴¹ Exhibition, Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen (2008).

as when Rogers sets out alone for Japan, leaving New at home with their small daughter: 'Not only was I seeing something extraordinary without you and missing you both like an amputated limb, the jet lag had made me extremely emotional.' New, on her part, recalls:

I was very aware of the lines I was making on the first walks with Ruby, as she led me ever so slowly on a twisty turny journey by the canal in Kreuzberg. She was not going from A to B but exploring the world from moment to moment, side tracked by small stones, acorns, bottle tops and dogs. My GPS made a lot of points that day and distance was condensed into a dance of back and forth rather than from here to there.⁴²

Rather than celebrating the heroic trajectory, plan b's reflections here suggest the loneliness of global travel, set against the fascination of a child's first walks through her locality, where the small, uncertain body leads her mother in a walk that resists cutting across the territory but twists, turns, redoubles, side-tracks and dances in its exploration of minutiae.

A similar comparison is suggested in Wrights & Sites' split-screen video-recording that accompanied their performance-lecture, 'Simultaneous Drift: 4 walks, 4 routes, 4 screens'.⁴³ In the video, the three male members of Wrights & Sites are seen on the streets of Exeter, Bristol and London respectively; walks characterized by spaces of sterility and frustration, as sites in the process of redevelopment are frequently barred, blocked or monitored. Against these three experiences, Turner is seen attempting to drift inside the house with her baby daughter:

I had imagined it as a sort of celebration of the domestic: You can drift in the house; I will drift in the house [. . .] and actually when I looked at [the video recording], it's quite sad [. . .] I hadn't realized that the extent of my ambivalence is very obvious [. . .] you can see it. Because I was feeling slightly kind of trapped and I was trying to sort of celebrate it, but also you can see there is also a frustration there.⁴⁴

Turner both transgresses the usual rules of the house (dressed for the outdoors; pushing the buggy upstairs; attempting to pitch a tent in the bathroom) and yet experiences frustration. On the other hand, the other walkers experience the frustrations of the public sphere.

In these examples, plan b and Wrights & Sites deliberately set the local/domestic and wide-ranging/public side by side. Other artists have specifically turned their attention to the apparently local and small scale. For instance, the London based triumvirate, walkwalkwalk (Clare Qualmann, Gail Burton and Serena Korda), consciously de'tourne Debord's expression of outrage by specifically mapping their own daily routes to define a triangle: 'rather than diverging from it we decided we would explore relationships within it'.⁴⁵ The trio organized their first night walk around this triangle of the East End of London in 2005, and have continued to mount these participatory, public walks twice a year, often coinciding with midsummer and midwinter nights. The walks are free, and walkers range in ages from toddlers to senior citizens. Subtitled the work 'An Archaeology of the

⁴² 42. Rogers and New, 5<http://www.planbperformance.net/meandyou.htm> [accessed 6 January 2010].

⁴³ 43. Wrights & Sites, performance-lecture performed at Arnolfini, Bristol as part of Situations' Material City programme on 11 October 2006. Documented at <http://www.misguide.com/ws/documents/situations.html> [accessed 30 May 2011].

⁴⁴ Unpublished interview with Heddon (2009).

⁴⁵ Qualmann, unpublished interview with Heddon (2009).

Familiar and Forgotten',⁴⁶ and acknowledging the precedence of Dada and Iain Sinclair, the artists recognize the value of their local, habitual and everyday practice, seeing it as filled with immanent potential. Since all places are in a perpetual state of flux and reconstruction, physical as well as cultural, they are also, to some extent, new. The East End, a site of urban regeneration coinciding with the 2012 Olympics, has experienced seismic shifts. walkwalkwalk literally map these material changes by producing bespoke maps for each event, marking the change of space through time. However, their walks connect not only with details of material changes in the fabric of the environment but with spectral selves. The local is scored through with autobiographical traces, place and identity mutually informing. As Gail Burton comments,

I am constantly crossing my path, as everybody is, and so it reconnects me with how I felt at different times, when I did that, and what was happening then, and what I saw and what I am seeing now and it is a whole web of my history and other people's.⁴⁷

This vision of the walk as part of a web, rather than as a single trajectory, suits a walking philosophy that values the familiar, local, temporal and socio-cultural, as well as the unknown, immediate, solitary, wild – and indeed, finds them entangled with one another. Such entanglement and its potential is also revealed in the work of Emma Bush, whose *Village Walk* (2008), based in her own village, Harbertonford, in Devon, was notable for the way it opened up unexpected spaces and connections within this village environment.⁴⁸ Walking as a focus for this work emerged out of Bush's desire to connect with place. The research process for *Village Walk* was slow, extended over months and involved repeatedly walking the route with elders from the village, and alone. The final walk linked a series of the elders' autobiographical stories. Each of these revealed an unexpected, hidden relationship to space. For instance, Pam's story told of a period of agoraphobia, in which she took up landscape painting, based on photographs her husband brought to her. Eventually, her desire to see the places she had painted brought her out of the house once more.

In our interview, Bush expressed an interest in 'spaciousness', a quality that she associated with giving space, paying attention, opening up. The walk introduced us to the imagined excursions of the agoraphobic, to the Samurai 'past life' of an elderly woman and allowed us to glimpse, through a window, a father dancing with his daughter. Such unexpected perspectives allowed us to become aware of the multiple spaces within spaces that a village affords.

This sense of the entanglement of expansive and local, familiar and unknown prompts us to recognize that we cannot assume comfort and safety within the local and familiar. Indeed, Bush admitted to her timidity in talking to people and the putting up of poster invitations around the village as something that felt 'really subversive, really uncomfortable'.⁴⁹ Misha Myers' *Way from Home* (from 2002), created for refugees living in Myers' city of Plymouth, reminds us of the always contextual nature of risk. Myers constructed a framework for walking, with the work actually being

⁴⁶ www.walkwalkwalk.org.uk [accessed 5 September 2011].

⁴⁷ Unpublished interview with Heddon (2009).

⁴⁸ Emma Bush is a member of propeller (along with Neil Callaghan, Augusto Corrieri, Pete Harrison and Timothy Vize-Martin). Founded in 2003 and based in Harbertonford, propeller's work is focused on explorations of place and social ecologies, and is committed to collaboration, dialogue and exchange. They utilize a variety of performance modes (including walks and performative lectures). See <http://propellernews.blogspot.com/?zx¼d6aad53070ae114c4> [accessed 2 February 2012].

⁴⁹ Unpublished interview with Turner (2009).

made by collaboration between a single refugee and a single Plymouth resident. Refugees were invited to map a route from the place they considered home to a special place they often visited. They used these maps to then walk the city of Plymouth (their new 'home'), accompanied by a city resident, transposing one set of landmarks onto another.⁵⁰ Myers has come to realize that such a seemingly simple formulation is not empty of risk, adventure or hazard to everybody. In particular, women refugees are frequently unable or unwilling to participate in a walking partnership, finding it easier to participate in group walks among women of their own cultural group.⁵¹ Myers' and Bush's work serves to instruct us that rather than presuming a safety in the 'local', we might usefully acknowledge and consider the value of risk attached to differently embodied experiences of place, to intimacy, to working in one's own back yard, to finding oneself in someone else's everyday.

Walking With . . .

In addition to the complex revisionings of scale encountered in these examples we are struck by the fact that, contra their walking-artist predecessors, the work seems actively to solicit, indeed build relations rather than escape them (relations with strangers, relations with others walking the Pennine Way, relations with refugees, relations with those in the locale . . .). Owen's strategic use of strangers to provide her with unpredictable direction certainly sets her route alongside her avant-garde predecessors, but her path also deviates by its conscious setting up of relations and of her embeddedness within these. Furthering and underlining the importance of creating relations, Owen linked *Looselink* to a more recent, long distance walk, *Grandmother's Footsteps* (2009). For this, the artist crossed fifteen counties in England, travelling from the end of May to mid-July, hand delivering messages from first time grandparents to other first time grandparents. She began her journey by collecting a message from the couple to whom she had delivered the last message in *Looselink*. *Grandmother's Footsteps* thus both cemented old relations and created new ones. It also afforded a meditation on becoming and performing a literal family relation – that of the grandparent – giving it cultural value in turn. The risk of representing insular family relations is avoided by the network of grandparents connected through Owen's footsteps.

The evidence of relationship-building in these works might lead us to conclude that women's walking is predicated on relationships to a significantly greater degree than that of their male colleagues, and yet such an idea must be treated with caution, given the danger of essentializing and the complexity and range of contemporary practice. The idea of walking as a convivial practice has recently been reflected upon by Misha Myers, who identifies it in the work of Graeme Miller, PLATFORM (in this instance in work directed by John Jordan and James Marriot) and Tim Brennan. Myers is right in her assumption that conviviality is not necessarily a gendered propensity.⁵² While it may be easier to place men within histories and conventions of epic walking, discovery, and colonization and to place women within conventions of the companion, the domestic, the vulnerable and socially dependent traveller, both men and women are engaged in both sites and actions. And yet, if these convivial walks indicate a wider cultural shift towards relational or dialogical aesthetics,

⁵⁰ See Misha Myers and Dan Harris, 'Way from Home', *Performance Research*, 9 (Summer 2004), 90–91; and DVD supplement.

⁵¹ Unpublished interview with Turner (2009).

⁵² As Myers' article proposes, there is a certain 'conviviality' among many performance works by men. In addition to the works mentioned there, the walking practices of Lone Twin and Mike Pearson, for example, often involve engaging with people.

by no means exclusive to women, their preponderance draws attention to a need to consider what we mean by 'relationship' and 'dialogue', rather than using these terms generically. As art critic Claire Bishop has advised, in response to the apparent increase in the field of 'relational work', 'if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why'.⁵³ We might, for example, and just for starters, place the work of Elspeth Owen beside that of male artists' Lone Twin and their repeated refrain 'Walk with me, Walk with me . . .', that occurs within the framework of works structured around heroic endeavour.⁵⁴ While their meeting with local inhabitants certainly provides welcome incidents, it is not the impulse for movement. Meanwhile, the walking practices of Bush, Owen and Myers encourage us to consider the 'relational politics of the spatial', as the artists engage and examine spatial relations, including their own position within those relationships.

In contrast to Thoreau's appeal to the 'ideal walker', in the work of these women artists we repeatedly encountered an embracing of 'obligations' rather than their abandonment. This suggests, at the very least, the necessity of rethinking the relation of walking to relationships. Further, a willingness to acknowledge and exploit entanglement in community and coalition often locates the artist as mediator for communication between people and places, begging the question of whether this role is one reason these walkers are less visible? It is evident that in setting up convivial events, these artists are not the *flâneurs*, nor yet the Situationists, within, yet separate from the ambulating crowd. They consider the crowd as their fellow walkers and companions. Some also recognized freedom in companionship – walking in a group, as walkwalkwalk does, opens up night time spaces that may otherwise be considered off-limits (certainly to many individual walkers).

While many of our female walkers employ a rhetoric that, like Michel de Certeau's (and before him, Benjamin's) suggests the political force of attention to detail, there is also consistent awareness of the ways in which walking itself is framed, compromised and directed by what Rebecca Schneider refers to as 'monumentality', the fixity of a patriarchal culture.⁵⁵ Walking might be a way of taking issue with constraints – with cultural assumptions about who can walk where, in what way, and with what value – but such constraints are never entirely absent. However uncompromising the walker, she is aware of the ways in which her body is complicit in maintaining the monumental, whether through an internalized fear of transgressing boundaries, whether through domestic constraints that keep her 'local', whether through the coding that makes her own body attract unwelcome attention or whether through cultural norms that constrain or alienate her geography. Many of our interviewees acknowledge anxiety as something that infiltrates their practices, either through the suggestions of others, or through their own internalization of perceived dangers. Bush, for example, explains that personal anxieties are a factor in her choice of location and route: 'I'm not that comfortable in walking in places that I don't know, on my own'.⁵⁶ Kenyon and Owen, meanwhile, both admit that part of their motivation for walking is to resist being debilitated by cautiousness and

⁵³ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51–79 (p. 65). For 'relational aesthetics', see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by John Howe (Paris: Presses du Re'el, 2002).

⁵⁴ Lone Twin are the duo Greg Whelan and Gary Winters, who began collaborating in 1997. 'Walk With Me Walk With Me Will Somebody Please Walk With Me' was the title of Lone Twin's 2002 performance lecture, which drew on their repeated use of walking in their work. In one piece, for example, they walked for eighteen hours back and forth across a bridge spanning the Glomma river in Norway, with people choosing to join them.

⁵⁵ Schneider, 'Patricide and the Passerby', pp. 52–56.

⁵⁶ Unpublished interview with Turner (2009).

fear. Despite the political optimism of these women, theirs tends towards a practice that does not offer wholesale alternatives or absolute freedoms (not even from representation and recuperation), since it observes the tensions within spatial practice and within subjectivity – our simultaneous resistance to and entanglement within macro structures.

We do not claim that the problematizing of binary scales and the values attached to them, or the use of walking as a practice of relations, of social making, are features exclusive to the work of women artists. But we do propose that they are recurrent within the practices we have researched, and they are not recurrent or even much in evidence in the existing critical evaluation of walking art. What this work prompts, then, and what we have attempted to begin here, is the construction of new frames of reference that allow for different engagements with walking art, and for different types of walks to be critically approached. Our research on women walking artists draws attention to a set of possibilities that have not been sufficiently analysed or acknowledged, wherever they occur – the political potential of a walking that mobilizes social relationships, without aspiring to an idealized notion of the free man, or free-footed nomad, without the abstract freedom of the epic task, and without prioritizing or opposing distance and dislocation over locality and rootedness. Such walking troubles the values we continue to attach to singularity and to spatio-temporal scale, confirming that the former is illusory and the latter entirely relative.