

The Art of Walking

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blacked-out reveries
from a page of Rousseau, ‘The Confessions of J.J. Rousseau’,
trans. 1783.

labyrinths
discovered text from Borges, ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’,
trans. D. A. Yates.

I
method

précis

It is simple and soon you will be running. But now you must make those tentative trails, the one two one and expect to trip.

This is just a beginning. First you must fall.

Once you have balance you may begin again. You are coltish, a stripling. You are a swaying sapling feeling to the tips of fine-fibred roots and pulling them free. The ground is uneven. The plane is littered with obstacles. You will learn to negotiate these.

Left. Right.

Left. Right. Find the rhythm. Grow taller. Take on speed.

Walk. Do this without thought, without effort. Walk as if your feet were lungs serving their unconscious purpose.

Walk holding hands. Walk on low brick walls and high grassy banks. Walk along the wet perilous perimeters of swimming pools. Walk on the gnarled foundations of Roman villas. Stub your toes on ancient hooks of flint.

Walk carrying lunchboxes in the shapes of animals. Walk carrying satchels containing Latin text books, plimsolls and unfinished homework in exercise books ruled with faint blue ink.

Walk carrying all of your worldly possessions in a bundle on a stick, a dog nipping at your heels, your clothes in rags, laughing.

Walk in parks. Walk on beaches. Walk beside busy roads and attempt to negotiate traffic. Walk in supermarket aisles steering trolleys, avoiding contact.

Walk for pleasure, slowly. Walk to clear your head. Walk to fill it.

Walk in sunshine with head high, seeking birdsong in trees, blinking in the light. Walk in rain under percussive umbrellas. Walk into high winds, gasping, shedding garments. Walk in sackcloth under raining blows, head bared, guilt-ridden.

Your soles thicken. Your legs fold like poorly-hinged gates. Your ankles soften with fluid. Your knees buckle. Take a seat. Allow your feet to rest on cushioned stools. Attach wheels to furniture, to stationary objects, to high-sided chairs. This is an ending: allow others to walk. Just watch.

contained, linear

Measure your right foot. Use a ruler, a wooden one, preferably yellow. (Your old school ruler is best.)

Work in inches. The body does not conform to metrics.

Place your left foot at the starting point. Imagine a chalked line on the floorboards. Step forward onto your right, heel to toe.

Waver: balance. Repeat.

Remember: you are not measuring distances. You are taking in perimeters.

Keep going, heel to toe to heel to toe and do not be tempted to pick up speed or fidget or fudge at corners for precision is vital and this is not about velocity or momentum so do not give in to the distraction of speed but stop

stop

and wait for the balance again. Now proceed, methodical.

Tortoise-like, you begin to understand vastness, the space of the shell and the space beyond the shell.

Do not stumble into meditation – that is for later. Remember that this is an experiment and should be conducted with absolute focus and rigour.

Consider the ditches around your paddock. Consider the walls of wire mesh around your pen. Consider the volume they encompass.

Complete the circuit and come to rest at the starting point, one foot hovering in accordance with perpetual motion.

Now complete the equation to determine the contained area in square feet.

To achieve the cubic volume, walk up the walls.

(If you forgot to count, return to step one.)

inverted

There are stars in the grass. You feel these with outstretched fingers. Your nails root in the soil, tickling the soft bodies of seeking worms. Your palms flatten. Your toes spring skywards. Your wrists beat with pressure, your knuckles rise and fall like viaducts.

Your fused calves are an arching whip above your torso. Your pointed feet are a hovering scorpion sting.

You look the laced boots of your companions humbly in the eye as you recede, a scraping suitor, from their presence.

You are a diver. The horizon swallows you.

subliminal

Do not look down. You have no need of maps. The path is sinking sand beneath shallow waves. You keep the world on your left, the sea on your right.

This is the street. You simply feel it. At the corner is the abandoned grocers, shutters down. The sign is illegible; you do not need the sign.

You need no compasses. Your feet swim below you. You sense the quiet ticking metal of parked cars, the distant reversing of vehicles, the whirr of passing bicycle wheels.

You cross the street. Your ankles describe the inclines of curbs, the distinctness of grass and gravel. The house peers above a bib of white-pebbled driveway, fat-cheeked, pink, stippled.

You no longer notice how ugly it is. You no longer notice the yellowed newspaper against the porch glass, the abandoned milk bottles, the layers of weather.

You open the door, remove your skin, hang it on the coat hook.