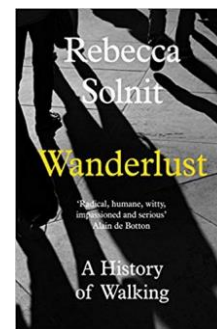


# Rebecca Solnit Wanderlust: A History of Walking

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## PART 1: THE PACE OF THOUGHTS

### 1. Tracing a headland – an introduction

'Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts.' 5.

'I like walking because it is slow, and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an our. If this is slow, the modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought, or thoughtfulness.' 10

'I remember explaining to a friend on this route almost three years earlier why I liked walking the same way over and over. I joked, in a bad adaptation of Heraclitus's famous dictum about rivers, that you never step on the same trail twice; and soon afterward we came across the new staircase that cut down the steep hillside, built far enough inland that the erosion wouldn't reach it for many years to come. If there is a history of walking, then it too has come to a place where the road falls off, a place where there is no public space and the landscape is being paved over, where leisure is shrinking and being crushed under the anxiety to produce, where bodies are not in the world but only indoors in cars and buildings, and an apotheosis of speed makes those bodies seem anachronistic or feeble. In this context, walking is a subversive detour, the scenic route through a half-abandoned landscape of ideas and experiences. (...)

It was the snake that came as a surprise, a garter snake, so called because of the yellowish stripes running the length of its dark body, a snake tiny and enchanting as it writhed like waving water across the path and into the grasses on one side. It didn't alarm me so much as alert me. Suddenly I came out of my thoughts to notice everything around me again—the catkins on the willows, the lapping of the water, the leafy patterns of the shadows across the path. And then myself, walking with the alignment that only comes after miles, the loose diagonal rhythm of arms swinging in synchronization with legs in a body that felt long and stretched out, almost as sinuous as the snake. My circuit was almost finished, and at the end of it I knew what my subject was and how to address it in a way I had not six miles before. It had come to me not in a sudden epiphany but with a gradual sureness, a sense of meaning like a sense of place. When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains.' 12-13

### 2. The mind at three miles an hour

'Jean-Jacques Rousseau remarked in his Confessions, "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs." The history of walking goes back further than the history of human beings, but the history of walking as a conscious cultural act rather than a means to an end is only a few centuries old in Europe, and Rousseau stands at its beginning. That history began with the walks of various characters in the eighteenth century, but the more literary among them strove to consecrate walking by tracing it to Greece, whose practices were so happily revered and misrepresented then. The eccentric English revolutionary and writer John Thelwall wrote a massive, turgid book, *The Peripatetic*, uniting Rousseauian romanticism with this spurious classical tradition. "In one respect, at least, I may boast of a resemblance to the simplicity of the ancient sages: I pursue my meditations on foot," he remarked. And after Thelwall's book appeared in 1793, many more would make the claim until it became an established idea that the ancients walked to think, so much so that the very picture seems part of cultural history: austere draped men speaking gravely as they pace through a dry Mediterranean landscape punctuated with the occasional marble column.

This belief arose from a coincidence of architecture and language. When Aristotle was ready to set up a school in Athens, the city assigned him a plot of land. "In it," explains Felix Grayeff's history of this school, "stood shrines to Apollo and the Muses, and perhaps other smaller buildings. . . . A covered colonnade led to the temple of Apollo, or perhaps connected the temple with the shrine of the Muses; whether it had existed before or was only built now, is not known. This colonnade or walk (peripatos) gave the school its name, it seems that it was here, at least at the beginning, that the pupils assembled and the teachers gave their lectures. Here they wandered to and fro, for this reason it was later said that Aristotle himself lectured and taught while walking up and down." The philosophers who came from it were called the Peripatetic philosophers or the Peripatetic school, and in English the word peripatetic means "one who walks habitually and extensively." Thus their name links thinking with walking. There is something more to this than the coincidence that established a school of philosophy in a temple of Apollo with a long colonnade—slightly more.

The Sophists, the philosophers who dominated Athenian life before Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, were famously wanderers who often taught in the grove where Aristotle's school would be located. Plato's assault on the Sophists was so furious that the words sophist and sophistry are still synonymous with deception and guile, though the root sophia has to do with wisdom. The Sophists, however, functioned something like the chautauquas and public lecturers in nineteenth-century America, who went from place to place delivering talks to audiences hungry for information and ideas. Though they taught rhetoric as a tool of political power, and the ability to persuade and argue was crucial to Greek democracy, the Sophists taught other things besides. Plato, whose half-fabricated character Socrates is one of the wiliest and most persuasive debaters of all times, is somewhat disingenuous when he attacks the Sophists.

Whether or not the Sophists were virtuous, they were often mobile, as are many of those whose first loyalty is to ideas.' 14-15

'Rousseau ... claimed, "Never did I think so much, exist so vividly, and experience so much, never have I been so much myself .. as in the journeys I have taken alone and on foot. There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts. When I stay in one place I can hardly think at all; my body has to be on the move to set my mind going. The sight of the countryside, the succession of pleasant views, the open air, a sound appetite, and the good health I gain by walking, the waspy atmosphere of an inn, the absence of everything that makes me feel my dependence, of everything that recalls me to my situation – all these serve to free my spirit, to lend a greater boldness to my thinking, so that I can combine them, select them, and make them mine as I will, without fear or restraint. " 19

'At the end of his life, he wrote *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (*Les Reveries du promeneur solitaire* in the original; 1782), a book that is and is not about walking. Each of its chapters is called a walk, and in the Second Walk, he states his premise: "Having therefore decided to describe my habitual state of mind in this, the strangest situation which any mortal will ever know, I could think of no simpler or surer way of carrying out my plan than to keep a faithful record of my solitary walks and the reveries that occupy them." Each of these short personal essays resembles the sequence of thoughts or preoccupations one might entertain on a walk, though there is no evidence they are the fruit of specific walks. Several are meditations on a phrase, some are recollections, some are little more than aired grievances. Together the ten essays (the eighth and ninth were still drafts and the tenth was left unfinished at the time of his death in 1778) portray a man who has taken refuge in the thoughts and botanical pursuits of his walks, and who through them seeks and recalls a safer haven.' 20-21

'The literature of philosophical walking begins with Rousseau.' 22

### **3. Rising and Falling: the Theorists of Bipedalism**

'Nowadays walking upright is considered to be the Rubicon the evolving species crossed to become hominid, distinct from all other primates and ancestral to human beings.' Lucy, *australopithecus africanus*, 3.2m years old, found in Ethiopia Lucy walked., fully upright.

### **4. The Uphill Road to Grace: Some Pilgrimages**

'Walking came from Africa, from evolution, and from necessity, and it went everywhere, usually looking for something. The pilgrimage is one of the basic modes of walking, walking in search of something intangible.' 45.

'Pilgrimage is almost universally embedded in human culture as a literal means of spiritual journey, and asceticism and physical exertion are almost universally understood as a means of spiritual development. ' 46.

'Pilgrimage is premised on the idea that the sacred is not entirely immaterial, but that there is a geography of spiritual power. Pilgrimage walks a delicate line between the spiritual and the material in its emphasis on the story and its setting: though the search is for spirituality, it is pursued in terms of the most material details—of where the Buddha was born or where Christ died, where the relics are or the holy water flows. Or perhaps it reconciles the spiritual and the material, for to go on pilgrimage is to make the body and its actions express the desires and beliefs of the soul. Pilgrimage unites belief with action, thinking with doing, and it makes sense that this harmony is achieved when the sacred has material presence and location. Protestants, as well as the occasional Buddhist and Jew, have objected to pilgrimages as a kind of icon worship and asserted that the spiritual should be sought within as something wholly immaterial, rather than Out in the world. There is a symbiosis between journey and arrival in Christian pilgrimage, as there is in mountaineering. To travel without arriving would be as incomplete as to arrive without having traveled. To walk there is to earn it, through laboriousness and through the transformation that comes during a journey. Pilgrimages make it possible to move physically, through the exertions of one's body, step by step, toward those intangible spiritual goals that are otherwise so hard to grasp. We are eternally perplexed by how to move toward forgiveness or healing or truth, but we know how to walk from here to there, however arduous the journey. Too, we tend to imagine life as a journey, and going on an actual expedition takes hold of that image and makes it concrete, acts it out with the body and the imagination in a world whose geography has become spiritualized. The walker toiling along a road toward some distant place is one of the most compelling and universal images of what it means to be human, depicting the individual as small and solitary in a large world, reliant on the strength of body and will. In pilgrimage, the journey is radiant with hope that arrival at the tangible destination will bring spiritual benefits with it. The pilgrim has achieved a story of his or her own and in this way too becomes part of the religion made up of stories of travel and transformation.' 50

## 5. Labyrinths and Cadillacs: Walking into the Realm of the Symbolic

'The cloisters that were part of every monastery and convent sometimes bore elaborate Christian stories. Usually a square arcade around a garden with a central well, pool, or fountain, the cloister was where monks or nuns could walk without leaving the contemplative space of the order. Renaissance gardens had elaborately arranged mythological and historical statues. Because the walker already knew the story, no words need be said.' 74-75

'But if the book has eclipsed the memory palace as a repository of information, it has retained some of its pattern. In other words, if there are walks that resemble books, there are also books that resemble walks and use the "reading" activity of walking to describe a world. The greatest example is Dante's *Divine Comedy*... Like a vast number of stories before and after, it is a travel story, one in which the movement of the narrative is echoed by the movement of the characters across an imaginary landscape.' 77-78

## PART TWO: FROM THE GARDEN TO THE WILD

### 6. The path out of the garden

'Halfway through the nineteenth century, Thoreau wrote, "When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a mall?" For Thoreau, the desire to walk in the unaltered landscape no longer seemed to have a history, but to be natural—if nature means the timeless truth we have found, not the historic specific we have made. Though many nowadays go to the fields and woods to walk, the desire to do so is largely the result of three centuries of cultivating certain beliefs, tastes, and values. Before that, the privileged seeking pleasure and aesthetic experience did indeed walk only in a garden or a mall. The taste for nature already entrenched in Thoreau's time and magnified in our own has a peculiar history, one that has made nature itself cultural. To understand why people chose to walk out in certain landscapes with certain agendas, one must first understand how that taste was formed in and launched from English gardens.

We tend to consider the foundations of our culture to be natural, but every foundation had builders and an origin—which is to say that it was a creative construction, not a biological inevitability. Just as a twelfth-century cultural revolution ushered in romantic love as first a literary subject and then a way of experiencing the world, so the eighteenth century created a taste for nature without which William and Dorothy Wordsworth would not have chosen to walk long distances in midwinter and to detour from their already arduous course to admire waterfalls. This is not to say that no one felt a tender passion or admired a body of water before these successive revolutions, it is instead to say that a cultural framework arose that would inculcate such tendencies in the wider public, give them certain conventional avenues of expression, attribute to them certain redemptive values, and alter the surrounding world to enhance those tendencies. It is impossible to overemphasize how profound is the effect of this revolution on the taste for nature and practice of walking. It reshaped both the intellectual world and the physical one, sending populations of travelers to hitherto obscure destinations, creating innumerable parks, preserves, trails, guides, clubs, and organizations and a vast body of art and literature with almost no precedent before the eighteenth century.' 84-85

'The real reason Wordsworth and his peers seem to be the founders rather than the transformers of a tradition of walking for aesthetic reasons is because the walks that preceded theirs are so unremarkable. In fact these short walks in safe places are only incidental to the histories of architecture and gardens; they have no literature of their own, only mentions in novels, journals, and letters. The core of their history is concealed within another history, of making places to walk, places that became larger and more culturally significant as the eighteenth century wore on. It is also the history of a radical transformation of taste, from the formal and highly structured to the informal and naturalistic. It seems, in its origins, a trivial history of the idle aristocracy and their architecture, but in its results it created some of the most subversive and delightful places and practices in the contemporary world. The taste for walking and landscape became a kind of Trojan horse that would eventually democratize many arenas and in the twentieth century literally bring down the barriers around aristocratic estates.

The practice of walking can be traced through places. By the sixteenth century, as castles were beginning to turn into palaces and mansions, galleries—long narrow rooms like corridors, though often leading nowhere—often began to be part of the design. They were used for exercise indoors. "Sixteenth-century doctors stressed the importance of daily walking to preserve health, and galleries made exercise possible when the weather would otherwise have prevented it," writes Mark Girouard in his history of the country house. (The gallery eventually became a place for displaying paintings, and though museum galleries are still a place where people stroll, the strolling is no longer the point.) Queen Elizabeth added a raised terrace walk to Windsor Castle and walked there for an hour before dinner on every day that was not too windy. Walking was still more for health than for pleasure, though gardens were also being used for walking, and some kind of pleasure must have accrued there. But the taste for landscape was still fairly limited. On October 11, 1660, Samuel Pepys went walking in St. James's Park after dinner, but he only notes the water pumps at work there. Two years later, on May 21, 1662, he writes that he and his wife went walking in White Hall Garden, but he seemed most interested in the lingerie of the king's mistress in the privy garden, evidently hung there to dry. It was society that interested him, not nature, and landscape was not yet a significant subject for British painting and poetry, as it was to become. Until the surroundings became important, the walk was just movement, not experience.

A revolution was under way, however, in gardens. The medieval garden had been surrounded by high walls, in part for security in unstable times. In pictures of these gardens, the occupants most often sit or recline, listening to music or conversing ... As the world became safer and the aristocratic residence became more a palace than a fortress, the gardens of Europe began to expand. Flowers and fruit were disappearing from the gardens; it was the eye to which these expanded realms appealed. The Renaissance garden was a place in which one could take a walk as well as sit, and the Baroque garden grew vast. Just as walking was exercise for those who need no longer work, so these vast gardens were cultivated landscapes that need no longer produce anything more than mental, physical, and social stimulation for walkers.' 86-87

'When the ha-ha came into being in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the walls came down in Britain. A ditch relatively invisible from any distance, the ha-ha—so named because strollers were said to exclaim "Ha ha!" in surprise when they came upon it—provided an invisible barrier that allowed the garden's inhabitants to gaze into the distance uninterrupted. Where the eye went, the walker would soon follow. Most English estates consisted of a series of increasingly controlled spaces: the park, the garden, and the house. Originally hunting preserves, parks remained as a kind of buffer zone between the leisure classes and the agricultural land and workers around them and often provided timber and grazing space. The garden was typically a much smaller space surrounding the house. Susan Lasdun, in her history of these parks, writes of the straight avenues of trees planted in parks and gardens in the seventeenth century: "These avenues provided the shade and shelter for walks which, having been made fashionable by Charles II, were now becoming de rigueur in parks. . . . Certainly the liking for air and exercise was already considered an 'English' taste. Walks were now laid out by private owners in their country parks, and walking became as much a part of the pleasure of a park as hunting, driving and riding. The walks themselves were made increasingly interesting, with aesthetic considerations developing from the simple static vista from a window or terrace, to something that took account of a more mobile point of view. . . . The walker in fact made a circuit, and in the eighteenth century this was to become the standard manner for viewing gardens and parks. The days when it was only safe to walk on the castle terrace—the allure—had long since passed."

The formal garden, with its patterns made of clipped hedges, geometric pools, and trees in orderly ranks, had suggested that nature was a chaos on which men imposed order... In England the garden would become less and less formal as the eighteenth century progressed, and this idea of naturalistic landscaping that would be called the *jardin anglais*, the English garden, or the landscape garden is one of the great English contributions to Western culture. As the visual barrier that separated it from its surroundings vanished, the design of the garden became less distinctly separate too.' 88-89.

'Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the landscape architect who was to complete the revolution in garden design with his unadorned expanses of water, trees, and grass... The garden, in the course of becoming more and more indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape, had become unnecessary – Walpole had said of the landscape architect William Kent that he had "leapt the fence and saw all nature was a garden." If a garden was nothing more than a visually pleasing space in which to wander, then gardens could be found rather than made, and the tradition of the garden walk could expand to become the tourist's excursion. Rather than looking at the work of man, the scenic stroller could look at the works of nature, and to look at nature as a work of art completed a momentous revolution. In Shaftesbury's terms, princely gardens had finally given way to wilderness, the nonhuman world had become a fit subject for aesthetic contemplation.

The aristocratic garden had begun as part of the fortified castle, and slowly its boundaries had melted away the melting of the garden into the world is a mark of how much safer England had become (and to a lesser degree, much of western Europe, where the fashion for the English garden soon caught on). Since about 1770, England had undergone a "transportation revolution" of improved roads, decreased roadside crime, and cheaper fares. The very nature of travel changed. Before the mid-eighteenth century, travel accounts have little to say about the land between religious or cultural landmarks. Afterward, an entirely new way of travel arose. In pilgrimage and practical travel, the space between home and destination had been an inconvenience or an ordeal. When this space became scenery, travel became an end in itself, an expansion of the garden stroll. That is to say, the experiences along the way could replace destinations as the purpose of travel. And if the whole landscape was the destination, one arrived as soon as one set out in this world that could be looked at as a garden or a painting. Walking had long been recreational, but travel had joined it, and it was only a matter of time before traveling on foot would itself become a widespread part of the pleasures of scenic travel, its slowness finally a virtue. The point at which a poor poet and his sister might travel across a snowy countryside for the pleasure of looking and walking was drawing near.' 92-93

## 7. The Legs of William Wordsworth

*Thomas de Quincey calculated that Wordsworth must have walked 175-180K miles in his lifetime; he walked nearly every day, 'and walking was both how he encountered the world and how he composed his poetry'. 'For Wordsworth walking was a mode not of travelling, but of being... The turning point in both his life and *The Prelude* is his amazing 1790 walk with his fellow student Robert Jones across France into the Alps, when they should have been studying for their Cambridge University exams. Wordsworth's most recent biographer, Kennedy Johnson, dramatically declares, "With this act of disobedience his career as a Romantic poet ay be said to have begun."* 107

'The walkers in the garden had been anxious to distinguish their walking for pleasure form that of those who walked for necessity, which is why it was important to stay within the garden's bounds and not to walk as travel – but Wordsworth sought out meetings with those who represented this other kind of walking... But walking wasn't only a subject for

Wordsworth. It was his means of composition. Most of his poems seem to have been composed while he walked and spoke aloud, to a companion or to himself... In *The Prelude* he describes a dog he used to walk with who would, when a stranger drew near, cue him to shut up and avoid being taken for a lunatic.' 113

'Of all the other Romantics, only De Quincey seems to have had a lifelong passion for walking comparable to Wordsworth's, and though it is impossible to measure pleasure, it is possible to say something about effects: walking was neither a subject or a compositional method for the younger writer the way it had been for the older. – Morris Marples credits him with being the first to go on a walking tour with a tent, which he slept in during an early sojourn in Wales to save money (the beginnings of the outdoor equipment industry show up here, in the special coats Wordsworth and Robert Jones had a tailor make them for their continental tour, in Coleridge's walking sticks, in De Quincey's tent, in Keats's odd travel outfit)... His fellow essayist William Hazlitt wrote the first essay on walking, but it began another genre of walking literature rather than extending the tradition Wordsworth took up, and it depicts walking as a pastime rather than a vocation. Shelley was too aristocratic an anarchist and Byron to lame an aristocrat to have had much to do with walking; they wailed and rode instead. Coleridge, on the other hand, had a decade of avid walking – 1794-1804 – which is reflected in his poetry from that time... He and the Wordsworths walked together many more times.. Although the links between walking and writing are neither so explicit nor so profuse in his work as in his friend's, the critic Robin Jarvis does point out that Coleridge ceased to write blank verse when he ceased to walk.' 116.

## **8. A Thousand Miles of Conventional Sentiment : The Literature of Walking**

'The first essay specifically on walking is William Hazlitt's 1821 "On Going a Journey," and it establishes the parameters for walking "in nature" and for the literature of walking that would follow. "One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey<sup>1</sup> but I like to go by myself," it opens. Hazlitt declares that solitude is better on a walk because "you cannot read the book of nature, without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others" and because "I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy." Much of his essay is about the relationship between walking and thinking. But his solitude with the book of nature is very questionable, since in the course of the short piece he manages to quote from other books by Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Gray, Cowper, Sterne, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, along with the Book of Revelation. He describes a day of walking thorough Wales launched by reading Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* the night before and quoting Coleridge's landscape poetry as he goes. Clearly, the books set forth the kind of experience of walking in nature he should have – pleasant, mingling thoughts, quotations, and scenery – and Hazlitt manages to have it. If nature is a religion and walking its principal rite, then these are its scriptures being organized into a canon. Hazlitt's essay became the foundation of a genre.' 120

'In 1913 the historian G. M. Trevelyan begins his "Walking" with "I have two doctors, my left leg and my right. When body and mind are out of gear (and those twin parts of me live at such close quarters that the one always catches the melancholy from the other) I know that I shall have only to call in my doctors and I shall be well again. . . . My thoughts start out with me like blood-stained mutineers debauching themselves on board the ship they have captured, but I bring them home at nightfall, larking and tumbling over each other like happy little boy scouts at play.'" 121

Thoreau.  
John Muir.

'The most impressive of the contemporary long-distance walkers I have read.. is Robyn Davidson, who didn't exactly set out to write about walking at all, but did so brilliantly in the course of her *Tracks*, a book recounting her 1,700 mile trek across the Australian outback to the sea with three camels. . . Midway in her journey, she explains its effect on her mind: "But strange things do happen when you trudge twenty miles a day, day after day, month after month. Things you only become totally conscious of in retrospect. For one thing I had remembered in minute and Technicolor detail everything that had ever happened in my past and all the people who belonged there. I had remembered every word of conversation I had had or overheard way, way back in my childhood and in this way I had been able to review these events with a kind of emotional detachment as if they had happened to somebody else. I was rediscovering and getting to know people who were long since dead and forgotten. . . . And I was happy, there is simply no other word for it." She brings us back to the territory of the philosophers and the walking essayists, to the relationship between walking and the mind, and she does it from a kind of extreme experience few have had.' 130

## **9. Mount Obscurity and Mount Arrival**

About mountaineering.

*Henriette d'Angeville*(first woman to climb Mont Blanc) : 'The soul has needs, as does the body, peculiar to each individual... I am among those who prefer the grandeur of natural landscapes to the sweetest or most charming views imaginable... and that is why I chose Mont Blanc... It was not the puny fame of being the first woman to venture on such a journey that filled me with the exhilaration such projects always called forth; rather it was the awareness of the spiritual well-being that would follow.' 142.

## 10. Of Walking Clubs and Land Wars

'Since English mountaineers founded the Alpine Club in 1857, outdoor organizations have been proliferating across Europe and North America.' 150.

'Everywhere but Britain, organized walking seems to become hiking, then camping, and eventually something as nebulous as, in contemporary terminology, outdoor recreation or wilderness adventure. The clubs are "walking and" organizations: walking and climbing and environment activism, walking and socialism and folk songs, walking and adolescent dreaming and nationalism. Only in Britain has walking remained the focus all along, even if the word rambling is often used to describe it. Walking has a resonance, a cultural weight, there that it does nowhere else. On summer Sundays, more than eighteen million Britons head for the country, and ten million say they walk for recreation. In most British bookstores walking guides occupy a lot of shelf space, and the genre is so well established that there are classics and subversive texts—among the former, Alfred Wainwright's handwritten, illustrated guides to the wilder parts of the country, and among the latter the Sheffield land-rights activist Terry Howard's itinerary of walks that are all trespasses. The American magazine *Walking* is nothing but a health and fitness publication aimed at women—walking appears there as just another exercise program—but Britain has half a dozen outdoor magazines in which walking is about the beauty of landscape rather than the body. "Almost a spiritual thing," the outdoor writer Roly Smith told me, "a religion almost. A lot of people walk for the social aspects—there are no barriers on the moors and you say hello to everyone—overcome our damn British reserve. Walking is classless, one of the few sports that is classless.'" 159-60

'Walking for pleasure had joined the repertoire of human possibilities, and some of those enjoying the expansion returned the favor and changed the world, making it into a version of the garden—this time a public garden without walls. The terrain shaped by walkers' clubs is spread differently across different countries. In the United States it's a patchwork of wild places and a broad political movement bent on saving the organic world. Radiating from Austria are several hundred lodges scattered across twenty-one countries and more than half a million outdoor types with their own environmentalist bent. In Britain it's 140,000 miles of paths and a truculent attitude about the landed gentry. Walking has become one of the forces that has made the modern world—often by serving as a counter-principle to economics.' 167

## PART THREE: LIVES OF THE STREETS

### 11. The solitary stroller and the city

'Dickens is among the first to indicate all the other things urban walking can be... The city becomes a tangle through which all the characters wander in a colossal game of hide and seek, and only a vast city could allow his intricate plots so full of crossed paths and overlapping lives. But when he wrote about his own experiences of London, it was often an abandoned city. "If I couldn't walk fast and far, I should explode and perish," he once told a fiend, and he walked so fast and far that few ever managed to accompany him. He was a solitary walker, and his walks served innumerable purposes. "I am both a town traveller and a country traveller, and am always on the road," he introduces himself in his essay collection *The Uncommercial Traveller*. ... The most memorable of them all is "Night Walks", the essay that begins, "Some years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night, for a series of several nights." He described these walks from midnight till dawn as curative of his distress.' 185-86.

'There is a subtle state most dedicated urban walkers know, a sort of basking in solitude—a dark solitude punctuated with encounters as the night sky is punctuated with stars. In the country one's solitude is geographical—one is altogether outside society, so solitude has a sensible geographical explanation, and then there is a kind of communion with the nonhuman. In the city, one is alone because the world is made up of strangers, and to be a stranger surrounded by strangers, to walk along silently bearing one's secrets and imagining those of the people one passes, is among the starkest of luxuries. This uncharted identity with its illimitable possibilities is one of the distinctive qualities of urban living, a liberatory state for those who come to emancipate themselves from family and community expectation, to experiment with subculture and identity. It is an observer's state, cool, withdrawn, with senses sharpened, a good state for anybody who needs to reflect or create. In small doses melancholy, alienation, and introspection are among life's most refined pleasures.' 186

Speaking as a Londoner, Virginia Woolf described anonymity as a fine and desirable thing, in her 1930 essay *Street Haunting*. "Daughter of the great alpinist Leslie Stephen, she had once declared to a friend, "How could I think mountains and climbing romantic? Wasn't I brought up with alpenstocks in my nursery, and a raised map of the Alps, showing every peak my father had climbed? Of course, London and the marshes are the places I like best." London had more than doubled in size since Dickens's night walks, and the streets had changed again to become a refuge. Woolf wrote of the confining oppression of one's own identity, of the way the objects in one's home "enforce the memories of our own experience." And so she set out to buy a pencil in a city where safety and propriety were no longer considerations for a no-longer-young woman on a winter evening, and in recounting—or inventing—her journey, wrote one of the great essays on urban walking. "As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six," she wrote, "we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's room." Of the people she observes she says, "Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to

give one the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others. One could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer." In this anonymous state, "the shell-like covering which our souls have excreted for themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye. How beautiful a street is in winter! It is at once revealed and obscured." She walked down the same Oxford Street De Quincey and Ann had, now lined with windows full of luxuries with which she furnished an imaginary house and life and then banished both to return to her walk. The language of introspection that Wordsworth helped develop and De Quincey and Dickens refined was her language, and the smallest incidents—birds rustling in the shrubbery, a dwarf woman trying on shoes—let her imagination roam farther than her feet, into digressions from which she reluctantly returns to the actualities of her excursion. Walking the streets had come into its own, and the soli-rude and introspection that had been harrowing for her predecessors was a joy for her. That it was a joy because her identity had become a burden makes it modern.' 187-88.

## **12. Paris, or Botanizing on the Asphalt**

*The narrow streets of medieval Paris 'were cut down like a forest by Baron Haussmann, who carried out Napoleon III's vision of a splendid – and manageable – modern city... The real complaint against Haussmann seems to be twofold. The first is that in tearing down so much of the old city, he obliterated the delicate interlace of mind and architecture, the mental map walkers carried with them... The second complaint is that with his broad, straight avenues, Haussmann turned the wilderness into a formal garden... It is a great irony that though the English garden had triumphed and gardens had become "natural" – irregular, asymmetrical, full of serpentine rather than straight lines – a formal French garden had been hacked out of the wilds of Paris.'* 2-5-06.

## **13. Citizens of the Streets: Parties, Processions, and Revolutions**

'Paris is the great city of walkers. And it is the great city of revolution. Those two facts are often written about as though they are unrelated, but they are vitally linked. Historian Eric Hobsbawm once speculated on "the ideal city for riot and insurrection." It should, he concluded, "be densely populated and not too large in area. Essentially it should still be possible to traverse it on foot. . . . In the ideal insurrectionary city the authorities—the rich, the aristocracy, the government or local administration—will therefore be as intermingled with the central concentration of the poor as possible." All the cities of revolution are old-fashioned cities: their stone and cement are soaked with meanings, with histories, with memories that make the city a theater in which every act echoes the past and makes a future, and power is still visible at the center of things. They are pedestrian cities whose inhabitants are confident in their movements, familiar with the crucial geography. Paris is all these things, and it has had major revolutions and insurrections in 1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, and 1968, and in recent times, myriad protests and strikes.

Hobsbawm addresses Haussmann's reshaping of Paris when he writes, "Urban reconstruction, however, had another and probably unintended effect on potential rebellions, for the new and wide avenues provided an ideal location for what became an increasingly important aspect of popular movements, the mass demonstration or rather procession. The more systematic these rings and cartwheels of boulevards, the more effectively isolated those were from the surrounding inhabited area, the easier it became to turn such assemblies into ritual marches rather than preliminaries to riot." In Paris itself, it seems that the saturation of ceremonial, symbolic, and public space makes the people there peculiarly susceptible to revolution. That is to say, the French are a people for whom a parade is an army if it marches like one, for whom the government falls if they believe it has, and this seems to be because they have a capital where the representational and the real are so interfused and because their imaginations too dwell in public, engaged with public issues, public dreams. "I take my desires for reality, because I believe in the reality of my desires," said graffiti on the Sorbonne in the student-led uprising of May 1968. That uprising captured its most crucial territory, the national imagination, and it was on this territory as well as the Latin Quarter and the strike sites around France that they came within a hairsbreadth of toppling Europe's strongest government. "The difference between rebellion at Columbia and rebellion at the Sorbonne is that life in Manhattan went on as before, while in Paris every section of society was set on fire, in the space of a few days," wrote Mavis Gallant, who was there in the streets of the Latin Quarter. 'The collective hallucination was that life can change, quite suddenly and for the better. It still strikes me as a noble desire.'" 218-19

## **14. Walking After Midnight: Women, Sex and Public Space**

*This chapter is about the right of women to walk the streets, and the link between women walking and sexuality.*

## **PART FOUR: PAST THE END OF THE ROAD**

## **15. Aerobic Sisyphus and the Suburbanized Psyche**

'The decline of walking is about the lack of space in which to walk, but it is also about the lack of time – the disappearance of that musing, unstructured space in which so much thinking, courting, daydreaming, and seeing has transpired. Machines have sped up, and lives have kept pace with them.' 259.

'The gym is the interior space that compensates for the disappearance of outside and a stopgap measure in the erosion of bodies. The gym is a factory for the production of muscles or fitness, and most of them look like factories.' 262.

### **16. The Shape of a Walk**

'The disembodiment of everyday life I have been tracing is a majority experience, part of the automobilization and suburbanization. But walking has sometimes been, at least since the late eighteenth century, an act of resistance to the mainstream.'

*This chapter is about walking as art and art as walking.*

### **17. Las Vegas, of the Longest Distance Between Two Points**

*Las Vegas is designed with a pedestrianised centre – walk, spend, admire, play - and otherwise to be navigated solely by car.*

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