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CONTENTS

2 Preface: Who is Walking?

5 Conscientious Objections

15 Border Crossings

23 Speeding towards Paris

28 Slow Walk to Freedom

34 Finding the Balance

44 In the Footsteps of Bosman and Dickens, via Hillbrow

51 A Cappella

61 Fast Forward

68 References

76 Afterthoughts

146 Bibliography

Preface:
Who is Walking?

In 1951 Ray Bradbury wrote his short story "The Pedestrian". The story records the last walk of Leonard Mead, the sole remaining pedestrian in A.D. 2053. Though part of a collection of science fiction stories, it was inspired by Bradbury's experience when out walking in Los Angeles one night with a friend. A police officer stopped them and asked them what they were doing. "Just walking," Bradbury replied.

"Well, don't do it again," said the policeman.

Los Angeles, Bradbury's home, is an extreme case in its autocentricity, but this suspicion of pedestrians is not new. Thomas De Quincey describes – in his account of his 1802 journey from Wales to London – the "criminal fact of having advanced by base pedestrian methods". The origins of a vagrant being described as a *tramp* don't require too much speculation.

In South Africa, with its particular history, remnants of the artificial construction of economic access along racial lines are echoed in the current profiles of pedestrians. Walking continues to be considered a practice of the poor and marginalized. And since the majority of the poor remain black, white pedestrians are regarded, if not with suspicion, certainly with curiosity.

While walking at all in Los Angeles is considered vaguely pathological, the profiles of people using public transport have come increasingly to resemble those in Johannesburg: almost invariably the working poor, and people of colour. But while in Joburg this reflects South Africa's history, in Los Angeles, with its largely immigrant population on the bus, it highlights America's relationship to the rest of the world, and the massive migrations of people globally, often in search of the American Dream.

At Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), with its 23 000 parking spaces, "the future touches down", writes travel writer Pico Iyer. Though ironically many new

arrivals don't seem to travel further than the vicinity of the airport, and end up working at hotels and gift shops, where their foreign tongues are a valuable asset.

And then there are those who cross the borders in less formal ways.

Most of Europe has developed a rich culture of urban walking over the past two centuries, which is not divided along class lines, as well as decent public transport systems. While America, by contrast, has lapsed further and further into autocentricity, apparently taking South Africa with it. It seems as if the rallying cry for "one man one vote", has alarmingly been replaced with "one person one car". The majority of South Africans it would seem, rich and poor alike, would support Margaret Thatcher's assertion that "if a man found himself on a bus at the age of twenty-five he knew he had failed in life".

From the hijackings in Johannesburg, to the oil wars initiated by the US (not to mention accidents and everyday pedestrian deaths), Henry Ford's dream seems to be responsible for a lot of violence. Shortly into the twentieth century, Ford stated: "I will build a motor car for the great multitude … it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one."

In his 1923 autobiography, *My Life and Work*, he reflected on the 7,882 distinct work operations required to manufacture the Model T. "Of these, 949 were classified as heavy work requiring strong, able-bodied, and practically physically perfect men; 3,338 required men of ordinary physical development and strength. The remaining 3,595 jobs were disclosed as requiring no physical exertion and could be performed by the slightest, weakest sort of men. In fact, most of them could be satisfactorily filled by women or older children. [Of] the lightest jobs … we found that 670 could be filled by legless men, 2,637 by one-legged men, 2 by armless men, 715 by one-armed men, and 10 by blind men."

When people ask me why I don't drive, my answer varies: from economics, to fear of the machinery, to the desire to remain connected to life on the street. All of these are true for me in one way or another. I mistakenly assumed, though, that I was unique in

this regard. Most non-drivers, I thought, either can't afford the car and driving lessons, or are simply afraid of it.

So when I asked a friend, who got his licence at almost forty, if he had found it a traumatic experience, I was surprised that he said it wasn't really fear that had stopped him from learning to drive sooner. "I just don't think I'm that kind of person," he said. It got me wondering what kind of person that is. Or rather, what kind of person is it who chooses *not* to drive? Perhaps there were more of us than I'd imagined.

Further investigation revealed a number of people who walk out of choice, and curiously the majority of them seemed to be writers, artists and political activists. It seemed there was an historical link between walking, creativity and protest. I decided to take a closer look at this largely overlooked subculture, and why pedestrianism has been given such a bad name. The essays that follow are the result.

On 22 August 2005 Ray Bradbury turned 85. Though he has taken us to outer space, he has never driven a car. He continues to live, work and walk in Los Angeles.

Andie Miller
Johannesburg
January 2006

Conscientious Objections

A watched kettle takes longer to boil, say the quantum physicists. With this in mind, my housemates and I decided to stick newspaper articles on the kitchen wall for each other to read while we were waiting. It was my week of cut and paste, in July 1988, and this was how I first really became aware of David Bruce.

Of course, I had been vaguely conscious of him until that point; his trial had been going on for months. But the idea that anyone would actually be sent to jail for refusing to do national service had not yet become a reality to me. As South African women we faced other threats of violence, but being conscripted into the army was never one of them, and not one I could fully digest.

Turning to the *Weekly Mail* that Friday, what first caught my attention was an article which had originally appeared in the *Village Voice* in New York. It told how Mbongeni Ngema, director of the hit musical *Sarafina!*, was being taken to court by one of his actresses, an American who had stepped in when one of the South African girls became ill. Her charge was that he hit her with a leather belt. He explained that it was part of his directing process, and his way of keeping order. It was cultural, he said. Outraged, the African-American woman protested that this was unacceptable to her.

Also in the *Mail* that week was an interview with actor John Kani, in which he suggested that, in his opinion, no whites were committed to change.

And then the photograph, on the front page of the *Star*, on Tuesday 26 July 1988, of David Bruce, with a yellow daisy in his lapel. It had been decided. He had been sentenced to six years in jail.

These memories flooded back to me a decade and a half later, after watching John Kani's powerful play, *Nothing but the Truth*. And I wondered where it was that the truth was located. It seemed to me somewhere in the subtext, between what we

articulate and what we are less sure of. As Kani reminded us, our collective history is a complex and contradictory one.

David, who had since become a friend and work colleague of mine, after serving two years in prison (essentially his prescribed two years of military service), had quietly been working at Ceasefire and then at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, as a researcher of militarisation and policing issues; with a view to ending the former, and transforming the latter.

He had also recently acquired a driver's licence.

I had always assumed that he had simply been afraid of driving, so it came as a surprise when he told me he hadn't driven because "I just don't think I'm that kind of person". What kind of person is that, I wondered? Or rather, what kind of person is it who chooses to walk?

Though he now owns a car, he complains about it eating into his walking time, and still seizes any opportunity to travel on foot. On the day of our interview he has taken a two-hour stroll over to me.

"Well, the most important thing is being an environmentalist," he says. "Nature, and protecting the earth are very important to me. Cars are just … each individual has got this enormous piece of metal and goes about discharging air pollution simply to get around. It seems like such a selfish thing. But also, there was never a car in my family. I'm the first one in my family to own a car."

David's late mother's family were refugees from Nazi Germany who came to South Africa in 1939; his father, British, arrived in the country in 1958. David and his brother Eric grew up near the inner city, in Berea. David now lives one suburb over, in Yeoville, as does his father, and Eric is in England. His father did try to learn to drive a number of times, but failed. Perhaps, David suggests, this instilled fear in him about learning to drive, too. (It makes me think about how no women in my family have ever driven.)

“But also if you grow up in the inner city,” he adds, “the sense of traffic is very chaotic. It’s not like growing up in the suburbs, where you can take the family car around the block. And the idea of learning to drive in that environment is much more frightening.”

My brief spell at driving lessons was with an instructor who insisted on throwing me into the deep end of early morning rush hour Joburg city centre traffic. I suspect this was what finally decided me not to put myself through the ordeal.

“Though I always had a sense that I didn’t have the right temperament for it,” he continues. “My consciousness of the present. You have to be very aware of what’s going on around you if you’re driving, and in some ways my consciousness seemed quite broken.

“But there’s also a sense of real enjoyment and freedom in walking. I can walk from my flat in Yeoville to work in Braamfontein without stopping once. Driving is a completely different experience because you’re much more constrained by rules.”

Johannesburg is notorious for its one-way streets. One of them almost cost me my life as a passenger in a near-fatal accident, when a friend drove in the wrong direction. And I’ve heard a number of moans about the constraints and frustrations caused by urban renewal and building operations in Braamfontein.

“As a driver you need to be very conscious of your visual environment. I don’t see things around me all the time. Part of the sensual pleasure of walking is a visual experience; it’s the pleasure of being amongst trees.” With approximately six million trees, Joburg is the most artificially-treed city in the world. Though rapid development is causing deforestation of the urban environment, and many of the established trees are also reaching the end of their life cycles, and beginning to decline.

“And the light,” David continues. “The sense of the natural environment around you. There’s an emotional richness to that. But I don’t notice the features of the houses that I’m passing.”

He suggests that his visual awareness may be underdeveloped. A result, perhaps, of growing up with a blind mother. Learning to "stay in the visual" is something he thinks he learned recently on a trip from Joburg to Cape Town. "After I nearly killed us half a dozen times.

"But there's also an immediacy to walking. Even walking through Hillbrow, I have a sense of being enriched by it. A sense of being on the racial frontier. Not a single other white person in sight. Unless I pass by Look and Listen records at 9 o'clock. Then I see Carlos opening the shop."

I know what he means by this. When I read Phaswane Mpe's novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, it struck me how the streets that Mpe names are the same ones I walked when I first arrived in Joburg from Cape Town in 1984. And yet they are different streets now. The corner of "the most notorious Quartz Street" and the "obscure" Kapteijn, where I lived, is an area I avoid now, skirting around the edges of the suburb, past the Police Station and over Constitution Hill as I walk. There's a peculiar ambivalence to this experience; of wanting to participate in something new, but not knowing one's place in it.

This inevitably leads us to questions of safety. Does David, as a man, feel safer than I do? Has he had any experiences of violence?

In the light of the number of incidents he discloses (and particularly now that he has a car), I am surprised that he is still walking. It seems like an act of passive resistance. "But I'm not a pacifist," he emphasises. "I fight back!"

His first experience of being attacked was in 1991. I become aware throughout the conversation how well he recalls dates. It seems to me that this is David the researcher at work. As though many of his choices, which flow against the mainstream, are a process of research: to explore less popular choices in the realm of possibility. A 'what would happen if?', in order to observe alternatives at work, and show that they are possible.

He had recently moved to Gainsborough Mansions, the Herbert Baker building at the top of Nugget Hill, on the border of Hillbrow. “My friend Karen had just got a new camera, Hillbrow was beginning to develop a certain ambience, and I thought it would make for some quite amazing photographs.” At the bridge above the Windybrow Theatre they were attacked. “And we’d bought these mielies, so we threw them at the guys. I’ve got this image in my mind … it’s like from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where that bone goes flying up into the air …” From this point of view, with us laughing in hindsight, a flying-mielie-as-weapon seems to be a more interesting urban African image than anything they could have captured on film. That time their attackers ran, and nobody was hurt.

Later that year he was walking across the park next to Abel Road. “And I had two worn out veldskoens in my bag, and half a cabbage.” (I had been thinking about footwear. As long as I’ve known him, veldskoene have been David’s shoes of choice.) “And I saw five guys walking in a kind of wall towards me. It was like that image from the John Carpenter movie, *Assault on Precinct 13*. The classic street terror image. In those days I had this strategy to scream as loud as I could, and then to fight them off.” Which he did, and only after kicking one, and them running off, did he discover that he had been stabbed. But he still had his bag.

“Then I moved to Germiston, just next to the railway station, and I’d catch the last train. The 10.10 train. And walking from the station a guy attacked me, and I shouted at him.”

The last time he was attacked was the second Friday night of January 1999, as he was walking, in the twilight, to his parents for supper. In Berea a man accosted him. The plastic bag with jars of jam that he was carrying, fell to the ground and broke. David punched him, and he was stabbed again. This time in the back of his arm, closer to his heart.

At the Joburg Gen (deserted, the post New Year early January lull, he speculates), the treatment cost him the money that he had with him. He realised then that if he’d just handed it over, there would have been no violence. “Overwhelmingly in these acts of criminality, the violence comes in where the victims have resisted.”

Now he does little night walking. Since 1999 he's been a practising Buddhist, and occasionally he walks to the Buddhist Centre in Kensington. He remains quite vigilant going through Bertrams. "But I won't do Hillbrow."

In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe describes his protagonist Refentše's reaction to his first night in Hillbrow, after arriving from a rural village in the Northern Province. "Then you shuddered into wakefulness…. A second gun shot rang in Twist Street, and you remembered Tiragalong with greater nostalgia than you ever imagined to be possible. A woman screamed for help. Police sirens went off loudly. You realised a few minutes later, from the fading sounds, that they were going to rescue someone else, elsewhere, and not the nearby screaming soul whose voice continued to ring relentlessly."

David continues: "But when I walk at night it's a different kind of walking. It's high-speed walking. And it almost uses an element of stealth. Then you have this experience that you can walk through places, and almost have the sense that no one's actually seen you. People are accustomed to a certain kind of rhythm of the environment, and so when people do see you, you enter their space. So *you're* more likely to startle *them*."

The issue of speed is the one that I'm most interested in with regard to people who choose to walk. David doesn't seem to feel pressurised by time. Is this accurate?

"No, that's not true," he says. He is very aware how caught up with stress he is when he leaves the front door to walk to work in the mornings. "A self-imposed anxiety about my employers, and getting to the office on time, and the impression I'm creating when I arrive late. There's a stress to do with the working day and being productive, so walking to work is always high-speed walking."

Does he feel that learning to drive has changed his relationship to walking?

"Oh definitely. When I first got a car, I suddenly had this feeling that my life had become much more busy, and I didn't have any time for walking. The rich variety of things to do that the modern world offers you is much more available to you if you

have a car, so you can go to Cinema Nouveau five nights of the week if you like. And you can go to the opening of this little exhibition at that little gallery, and you can make little dinner arrangements. Whatever takes your fancy. Suddenly you have all these choices. So driving also requires learning the skill of choosing. When you have fewer choices, choices are made for you. Before I had a car I had to follow set routes.

"And then there's also this issue of buying things. With a car you can go out and get things that you can bring back to your home. You can purchase big things. And this is the model being exported to the developing world. But it's unsustainable, this lifestyle that we take for granted."

Does he consider himself a Marxist?

"No. Of course as a student almost everyone was once a Marxist, but by 1987 I was no longer a Marxist. It seemed to me a materialist philosophy that didn't really understand human beings."

Now that he's driving, he also misses his interaction with taxi drivers. "Everyone always seems to exclaim in shock and horror when I tell them what a taxi costs, but now I spend more than I've ever spent in a month on taxis, on car insurance. Especially since I've lost my no claim bonus."

In February this year David had his first car accident. "They don't really teach you when you're learning to drive about speed and dirt roads," he says wryly. "All the tests are on tarred roads. But gravel roads are a different story. I was on my way to Mountain Sanctuary Park, and I had some idea that one could get out there fairly easily in about two hours. When I hit the dirt roads there was a sign that said: *Road in bad condition – drive at own risk*, but towards the end I was racing, because I was worried that I wouldn't get there before the gates closed at half past six. And my car spun out of control." He was unhurt, but the car was beyond repair.

The most painful part of the process for him was the "schlep" of the paperwork; of "having to deal with the administrative side". He was without a car from the beginning of February to the end of July, and "it was actually quite nice", he says.

But now he's back in the driver's seat. "Driving is about taking yours and other people's lives in your hands."

The complexities and contradictions implicit in decision-making are not new to David. Speaking of his choice to go to jail instead of to the army, he talks about the "bizarre and peculiar heroic act" that people witnessed. "But there was also a type of madness associated with it." In 1999 he was diagnosed with bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder. And he was, he recognises now, "in a bipolar episode" at the time.

A manic phase involves "heightened mental activity and lucidity", which allowed him to develop a very clear understanding of the situation. Questions of morality and principle were at stake, particularly with regard to his family's history.

"In many ways it was an act of warfare," he says. "All of the armed propaganda that was going on at the time … there was political potential. I saw all its dimensions, and being manic enabled me, as a usually introverted person, to make the decision.

"I was deeply affected by fear, and I wouldn't have been able to deal with physical assault. I didn't have the kind of temperament, the mental coolness, required for going underground. There were people going on trial all the time for various things, and being sent down for extended periods of time, and the government was able to portray them as terrorists. Armed struggle increased a kind of polarisation. But there were different potentialities here. It was one way of fighting the war, while being loyal to the soldiers on both sides. Of doing no harm."

He adds soberly: "I think that violence is what men are emotionally and physically programmed for. And when you're fighting a war, protection is achieved through vanquishing the enemy. If I had been forced to, I would have been a committed soldier."

More recently, however, the war that either unites or divides us is the war on crime. And walking in the streets of Johannesburg is a way now for David of doing no harm.

A way of trusting, despite fear, that humanity will prevail rather than savagery. And a way of crossing battle lines, when excessive consumerism itself appears to have become an almost violent act; particularly in relation to men and their cars.

As a driver he has now become aware of the sense that pedestrians "have to scurry out of the way of cars. I've had people driving virtually over my toes. But pedestrians can't afford to get into confrontations with cars. And when you're driving, you suddenly have that sense of power when people have to scurry around in front of you. Particularly the elderly. It's a type of tyranny."

The gender dimension of not being able to drive had become an issue for him too. "In a couple of relationships that I was involved in, there was an enormous discomfort on my part. I was continuously being driven around by women. There's a sort of judgement of you by society, or sense that you're stupid if you don't buy into accepted lifestyles, that was challenging my masculinity. As if you can't be a real man if you don't drive." And perhaps, it occurs to me, a similar perception by some if you won't carry a gun.

"The one thing I've always found incredibly difficult about walking is, I've always felt so visible. Not to fellow pedestrians, but to the gaze of the people in the cars. And I felt a sense of increasing marginalisation. So getting a licence was a moment of liberation, but I really would have preferred not to buy into the whole materialism thing."

For the past few years, as a Buddhist, he has been engaged in daily yoga and meditation. And while his "sense of identification with it grows and diminishes in intensity (I've never completely abandoned my Jewish identity)", it is, he believes, what has enabled him to keep balanced. He has never taken medication for his bipolar disorder.

"And walking?" I ask.

"Oh, I'm sure the walking helps," he smiles.

It’s been three hours since he arrived on foot, armed only with pawpaws as a gift for me. But now the light has begun to fade, and I suggest that we call a taxi for him. “That’s probably a good idea,” he agrees.

As he waves goodbye, we can smell the approach of a welcome Johannesburg thunderstorm.

Border Crossings

August 1988

I was standing on Hollywood Boulevard, waiting for a bus. I know, it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke. But it isn't, believe me. If you've ever caught a bus in Los Angeles you'll know that it's tedious. It seems *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* was closer to the truth than many people would care to admit, and General Motors crippled one of the best public transport systems in the world in the 1940s in order to sell more of their vehicles. GM was found guilty in 1949 of "conspiring to monopolize sales of buses and supplies to companies owned by National City Lines", and fined $5000. But the damage was done.

As Judge Doom says in *Roger Rabbit*: "I see a place where people get on and off the freeway. On and off, off and on all day, all night! Soon, where Toon Town once stood will be a string of gas stations, inexpensive motels, restaurants that serve rapidly prepared food. Tire salons, automobile dealerships and wonderful, wonderful billboards reaching as far as the eye can see! My God, it'll be beautiful!"

As a non-driver, I found LA the only place in the world where walking felt pathological. Walking down Sunset Boulevard one evening to the Comedy Store, I had that familiar feeling of discomfort I experienced on my first walk down Quartz Street, in Hillbrow, in 1984. "Well you know, about 64 hookers work this street," my friend Elzabé had said. (I don't know where she got that figure.) A sign at an entrance off Sunset Boulevard read: "Pedestrians not allowed". Planners in the Sixties had declared that "The pedestrian remains the largest single obstacle to free movement", and now, according to the National Highway Capacity Manual, pedestrians are endured as a "traffic interruption". Apparently the only walking seen as normal here was the Walk of the Stars, on Hollywood Boulevard, where tourists read the names of celebrities as they hopefully walked in their footsteps.

Autopia is the only one of Disneyland's original rides that remains, dating back to their opening day on July 17 1955. But while each new freeway in LA promised to

solve the growing traffic problem, gridlock became the order of the day, and Disneyland is probably the only place where "Autopia" still exists. There, however, not only pedestrians, but all humans, have been disposed of. In the new version of the ride, a giant video screen plays "animated scenes of cars discussing life's challenges while providing insights into the world as they see it [and] billboards along the highway advertise directly to the vehicle". As visitors circle the tower building, shaped like a giant piston, windows provide glimpses into a three-dimensional model city inhabited exclusively by animated talking cars.

Anyway … I was standing waiting for the bus, with my best friend and guardian of my sanity: my walkman. The radio in LA was pretty good. So I switched on and heard: "There were things I said to my son as he grew into manhood. You want your laundry fast, take it to that Chink on the corner. When you go to buy that car, don't let 'em try to Jew you down. I don't want you to take any shit from that man you work for. You're not his nigger. I did not view these things as a mark on him. They were just a necessary evil of living in a hard world….

"This morning I went to his house to borrow his mower. Had it in the basement all winter, dad. Haven't brought it up, yet. You'll see it down there. In the basement, where I had never been, were all the things my son had learned from me. There were weapons. There were explosives. There were maps outlining a proposed White Homeland. There were newspapers: *The Spotlight, The Thunderbolt, The Torch, The Way, The Aryan Nations Newsletter*. There was a picture of Adolf Hitler. And beside it, also in a place of honor, was a picture of me."

It was a play called *God's Country*, on at the ACT Theatre in Seattle. Must contact the playwright, I thought. Sounds like a play we should do in South Africa.

The bus arrived.

*

After the Great Depression in the 1930s, and World War II, Americans were thankful for the birth of the suburbs, which enabled working class people to own their own

homes. Government insisted on racially segregated developments, however, and the Federal Housing Authority Underwriting Manual stated that "if a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes". After 1950 this was outlawed by the Supreme Court, but divisions were already established, and the "white fright" of the post civil rights period caused more people to flee to the suburbs, to "places empty of anyone else's memories and rich with potential". Now everything was spread out and far away, and public transport was poor. And thus the sprawl began. Individual car ownership, which had become affordable to the majority, became the aspiration. It is said that in a poll during the war, 87% of Americans stated the first thing they wanted after it ended was a new car.

Anita Bryant, after being crowned second runner-up to Miss America in 1959, performed in Flint, Michigan – home to one of General Motors' biggest manufacturing plants – carrying a giant sparkplug, and singing: "You'll Never Walk Alone". There are 500 bus routes in LA, but the majority of Angeleños pride themselves on never having caught a bus, which they see as only for those who are too poor to afford a car. According to Anthony, the gangster in *Crash*, "they put them great big windows on the sides of buses" for one reason only: "to humiliate the people of color who are reduced to ridin' on 'em."

*

I'm without the walkman today, and catching the bus with my friend Carol, a playwright, with whom I'm staying in LA. It is a sweaty, humid day, but on Hollywood Boulevard, outside a theatre advertising "Live Nude Show", "Peep Show" and "Adult Book Store", we encounter … a pile of snow. Where did it come from? This is Hollywood.

I am shocked to discover how rundown Hollywood is. It reminds me of Hillbrow, in Johannesburg. "But of course Hollywood is no longer a place," says Carol. "It's a concept. When you write for Hollywood, you're simply writing for a market. Where the movie gets made is irrelevant."

Finally the bus arrives. “You notice everyone’s in their own movie,” she continues. There’s an old woman in a shiny green outfit – including tinsel – looking like an out-take from the Emerald City scene in *The Wizard of Oz*. And an old man in soiled pyjamas. “I suspect he checked himself out of a hospital,” she says. I imagine how scary it must be to be old and poor in this city.

Carol explains how Reagan cut social programmes when he was governor of California. And we’re now in the run up to the Bush vs. Dukakis election. A bumper sticker reads: “A Dukakis in the hand is better than a Quayle in the Bush.” But this doesn’t seem to stop them just a few months later. It seems Dukakis is too short, Greek, and his wife has a problem with prescription drugs, if the ‘debates’ are anything to go by.

We visit an exhibition of Hollywood as it was in the Fifties, and even I feel nostalgic.

On the walk home, the Steven Cohen print I’m wearing prompts conversation with some strangers watering their garden under the H O L L Y W O O D sign. Turns out she’s South African too (from Pietermaritzburg) and we have some common acquaintances.

*

Steven Dietz, the playwright, returns my call. The publicist of the theatre has given him my number. He sounds cagey: “Where would the play be staged?” I’ve no idea I tell him. I haven’t thought that far. “Tell me about your country,” he says. I send him three articles: a piece on director Mbongeni Ngema hitting the cast of his play *Sarafina* with a belt to discipline them; an interview with actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, suggesting no whites are committed to change; and a piece on David Bruce, sentenced to two years in prison for refusing to do military service. I don’t know why I brought them with me. It seemed like a good idea while I was packing.

He sends me a copy of the play.

*

My friend Phillippa – a native Johannesburger, but working and playing in LA for a while – always on the lookout for the odd and eccentric, takes me on some adventures … First stop, 3am to an old movie theatre in downtown LA. She has befriended the elderly Latino caretaker, so he lets us in to look around the empty theatre, which she has seen before. The ghosts of the past are almost visible. We imagine what it must have been like in this vast expanse of foyer, now with worn carpets, when the stars frequented it in their furs. Now the theatre screens Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood movies with Spanish subtitles for the local youth. And grafitti is scratched on the back of the seats. Its history has no meaning for those using it.

*

The next day is Sunday, and we visit the Superet Light Church. Its entrance is lit up by an eleven-foot purple neon heart of Christ. A brochure declares: "Dr. Trust gives lectures of the Atom Aura Light Science every Tuesday at 8 p.m. at 2512 West Third Street. (Los Angeles, California). All religions are welcome; and is free to all to hear and see facts on the screen."

This visit is Phillippa's first, too. Unfortunately they will not let us in with bare arms, so we sit in an antechamber and listen to the service of Dr. J.C. (Josephine) Trust over a loudspeaker. We discover later that it was a recording: "Mother Trust" has been dead for decades. All of her followers appear to be Latino.

Their brochure states: "Dr. Josephine C. Trust, S.A.A.S. is the only Founder of this Superet Science, the Superet Light Doctrine and also the Superet Brotherhood with the P.O.P.M. Club -- being the only Chartered Superet Atoms Aura Scientist of the Superet Science in the world, which started in 1925 with the Charter and the Name, Superet, Copyright."

The P.O.P.M., or Prince of Peace Movement, "is a non-sectarian Club of Peace composed of all denominations, religions, nations and colors -- rich or poor -- united in one thought: to create peace". Colour, it appears, is central to their philosophy,

which examines "invisible spectrums and the spiritual significance of" favourite colours.

Later, in 1992, the Superet Light church building was declared an Historic Cultural Monument (No. 555) by the Los Angeles City Council.

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September 1990

Steven Dietz arrives on my doorstep in Yeoville. He is in Johannesburg for the opening of his play, which is being staged by the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal, at the Windybrow Theatre, at the top of Nugget Hill in Hillbrow. He appears surprised as I open the door. Since we have never seen each other during our communication, it seems he thought I was black. He writes later: "…though I wanted to think I was different, I remembered boarding my plane in Frankfurt to fly to Johannesburg. And, as I watched each white person get on board, something in the back of my mind that I am not proud of pointed at them, one by one, and said 'racist, racist, racist.'"

"Your trip," a friend had told him, "will be about one thing and one thing only: confronting your own whiteness."

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October 2005

It's been half a century since Rosa Parks (who died in her sleep on 24 October at the age of 92) "stood up by sitting down" in one of the seats reserved for white passengers on a bus, in Montgomery, Alabama. As the Neville Brothers sing, because of her, "we don't ride on the back of the bus no more". These days, in LA, local historian and essayist DJ Waldie observes, the bus is "an unstable, third world country on wheels". A middle-aged "not-quite-middle-

class" white male, he is in the minority, and something of a curiosity. He uses the bus because, though he can drive, his eyes won't allow him to.

Information about bus routes, times, and stops, he describes as "mostly folklore". Some of this information you could learn "if you spoke Tagalog or Khmer", or at least Spanish. Since he appears both competent and harmless, he is often asked for assistance, but anything he has to offer – relying on the official version – could also be a myth.

There is a map. But the map is never the territory. And like LA's fragmentary stories – believed to intersect at certain points – one is often left with nothing but white space. "If you're smart and you must ride the bus," Waldie says, "the word of mouth of beauticians and factory hands will make bearable your powerlessness." Allow ten minutes for transfers, say officials; but travellers know half an hour would be safer. The bus is not for the impatient, or the incontinent: there are rarely public toilets along the way.

He tells his stories, says Waldie, because of a "longing for a sense of place". And this sense of place is most real to him in the "brown city" – in the words of memoirist Richard Rodriguez – that lives in the shadows of the glamour and wealth.

LA is a city where many go to be discovered, but as many go to get lost. Addressing the drivers cocooned inside the gridlock on the freeway, Waldie writes: "Public transit is almost invisible to you…. You won't ever see the civil gesture of the tall, young black man toward the old white man whose leg he must brush aside to pass down the aisle of the packed bus, a light double tap with the side of the young man's hand on the old man's shoulder and a low word of excuse answered with a nod and a word, and the old man's mild face half turned to the young man's."

"It's the sense of touch," says Don Cheadle in *Crash*. "In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In LA, nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something."

Of the future of LA literature, Waldie predicts: “The standard for the excellence of our stories won’t have been set in the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, but by women talking at a hearth baking *chipati* and men whispering in Spanish before slipping between strands of barbed wire across any border south of here.”

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Hillbrow, too, is finally a third world country; no longer reserved for whites, or sheltered from the rest of Africa north of its borders. I walk around the outskirts, rather than through the middle of it, when I can. The late Phaswane Mpe’s novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, it has been said, “shows the complexity of blackness in a context in which race is no longer a defining factor and even ethnicity has been overtaken by the large movement of non-South Africans into Hillbrow.” Now the questions about race seem as unclear as the answers.

These days the buses in Joburg still run, but they are erratic, so I prefer to use the less formal minibus taxis, the *Zola Budds*, which zip by every few minutes; named after South Africa’s little barefoot runner of the eighties, now most famous for accidentally tripping Mary Decker at the 1984 Olympics. Usually I am the only white passenger; just one amongst the carless masses moving from A to B. Despite precarious driving, I put my trust in this foreign country, where I do not understand the languages, the lyrics of the songs, or the news on the radio. Nobody asks me for directions. It’s the one time when I’m forced to confront my whiteness.

Speeding towards Paris

It was the first spring of the new millennium. I was doing an internship in London, and felt burnt-out from just a couple of months on the London streets, which seemed populated by a tightly packed frenzy of people racing to Who-knows-where-dot-com. I tried to step aside and let those who were in more of a hurry than me pass, but there was nowhere to step aside to. I was met with glares and curses. Nothing to do but keep on moving.

"I apprehended for the first time those particular illusions of mobility which power American business. Time was money. Motion was progress," said essayist and cultural commentator Joan Didion in the 1970s.

Back in 2000, a giant billboard for a computer company, Breathe.com, towered over me in the gloom of the Underground each morning: "One big rush – does that describe your life? Sometimes it's a great feeling, but when it's not and life gets too much: Relax. Just Breathe. Breathe brings you sophisticated technology which is easy to control, to help you get the most from whatever you are doing, whether you're at your desk or on the move." A picture of a fish with an oxygen tank on its back dominated the ad. This was particularly ironic since the recent dot-com boom and freefall of a few weeks earlier. And there we were thinking for one brief moment that this miraculous invention, the Internet, was going to save the world, and make us all rich.

I decided to take a few days off and visit an old friend in Paris. Four hours on the Eurostar, the high-speed train that travels under the English Channel through the Channel Tunnel, and I would catch up with Paris, which is an hour ahead of London, arriving five hours later. It was twelve years since I'd been to Paris.

The day that I left on the trip, a colleague sent me an e-mail about a call for submissions for a journal called *M/C* (Media Culture), and said: "You should contribute something to this." It was for their "speed" issue. "Speed," it read, "is a drug: it gets us up, gets us going, gets us going somewhere, but where and why

remain unanswered questions. Speed is one of the defining metaphors of contemporary life in advanced capitalist economies: the speed of the stock market, the speed of technological change …" I had nothing else to do while sitting still for hours on the train, so I spent the journey pondering these questions, and what I might write.

"Urbanist and militant" French philosopher, Paul Virilio – author of books like *Speed and Politics* and *The Information Bomb* – came to mind as I was hastening towards his home. Virilio coined the term "dromology" for the study of speed, and has defined it as "the social, political and military logic of systematic movement accelerated to a vanishing point at which territory, as traditionally conceived, is replaced by a government of nothing but time". We must beware the approaching "dictatorship of speed", he warns.

I had visions of time warps and tumbling down rabbit holes as we travelled through the tunnel, and arrived with my mind racing, feeling exhausted, and not prepared for a sharp change in perspective.

Paris, home of the *flâneur*, those nineteenth-century bourgeois bohemian gentlemen of independent means and leisure, who would "promenade without purpose", and go "botanising on the asphalt", where the trendiest pastime, legend would have it, was to take your tortoise for a walk. But the golden days of *flâneurie*, alas, are gone. Strolling has been replaced by browsing: generally done online.

Charles Baudelaire, the most famous *flâneur*, and poet, scented "a chance rhyme in every corner". But Baudelaire's "cosy, dirty, mysterious" Paris of winding streets in which the *flâneur* could lose himself with ease, was bulldozed by Baron Haussmann, commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew in 1853 to "modernise" the city. The "labyrinthine medieval Paris of the romantics" was destroyed, as Edmund White puts it, "by one of the most massive urban renewal plans known to history, and replaced by a city of broad, strictly linear streets, unbroken façades, roundabouts radiating avenues, uniform city lighting, uniform street furniture, a complex, modern sewer system and public transportation (horse-drawn omnibuses eventually replaced by the métro and motor-powered buses)". The real reason for the new broad boulevards was to obstruct barricade-building, and according to one more cynical suggestion there

were also “hopes to flush out the hidden haunts of low-life where bohemia had once gathered and barricaded”.

In 1857 photographer Eugène Atget was born, near Bordeaux. By the end of the nineteenth century – at the same time that “motion pictures” were being born in California, which “has no past – no past, at least, that it is willing to remember”, Atget, Paris, “penniless but driven”, was obsessively photographing every corner of the city, determined to document it before it disappeared.

But ironically, it was in Paris that the first commercial exhibition of moving pictures occurred, and ‘the cinema’ began. On the 28th of December 1895, at ‘Salon Indien’, in the basement of the Grand Café on Boulevard de Capucines, while the wealthy and fashionable dined upstairs, the Lumière (light) family introduced their new invention, the Cinématographe, to the public, and screened ten of their films, to an audience of 33. The press, though invited, failed to show. The price of entrance was one franc. Inventor son, Louis, continued to assert to shrewd businessman father, Antoine, that it was “an invention without any commercial future”.

The screening included their first film *Lunch Hour at the Lumière Factory*, but the film that caused a stir was *Arrivée d'un Train à La Ciotat*. It was a minute long, and the cast was made up of members of the Lumière family and employees from their photographic supplies factory. “It showed a school-of-Monet style train arriving at a station,” and according to popular legend, (depending on which version you hear): “at the sight of the train steaming ever closer to the screen, a number of the … audience ducked behind their seats”, or “fled the café in terror, fearing being run over by the ‘approaching’ train.”

In the year of documentary photographer Atget’s birth, Karl Marx had begun drafting the *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (*Grundrisse*), in which he predicted that the contradictions of capital would spur on the annihilation of space by time. He wrote: “While capital … must strive to tear down every barrier … to exchange and conquer the whole earth for its markets, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time.”

Herman Charles Bosman said of Paris in 1936, "A lot of people complain that Paris is not what it used to be. They say that the old carefree life of the artist and the poet are no more. They blame all sorts of conditions for it. They say it is the fault of the machine age, or of the rise of materialism, or of the tax on opium.

"For that matter, people say the same thing about Chelsea. They say that many of Chelsea's best artists have been driven south of the river into Battersea, or they have been driven west into Hammersmith, or in a northerly direction into Hampstead…. But if the best artists have been driven out of Chelsea, the worst ones have remained. And they will always be there, no doubt, introducing unwonted splashes of colour into the sombre King's Road when they walk abroad; leaving behind, when they move from one set of furnished apartments to another, weird stacks of paintings in lieu of rent."

And he concludes: "So, too, it is with Paris. The Paris that Villon knew is still there. The Paris of Baudelaire and Verlaine…. It lives on, that wayward spirit animating the visionary and the past, arraying the half-god in sudden jewels and startling sublimities, and then putting him again in the gutter, to wonder vaguely, without splendour and without laughter."

"In the cracks," says White, "are those little forgotten places that appeal to the *flâneur*, the traces left by people living in the margins". According to White, the most interesting parts of Paris, now, are "Bellville and Barbès, the teeming *quartiers* where Arabs and Asians and blacks live and blend their respective cultures into hybrids."

When I arrived in Paris, my friend and I, with different needs, and having too many years between us now, were prickly with each other. Seeing things from different directions, our history was not enough to revive our friendship. These few months had been my first time out of South Africa in twelve years, and I guarded them selfishly, as my time-out, wanting to talk of other things. But she had been gone for thirteen years, having left to get away from inequalities and the burden of being privileged, and to find the space to be an artist, and wanted to know how things were "back home".

Relying now solely on the weight of my own body to transport me, I felt drained: by the heat; wandering aimlessly; my tired sore feet, and the price of water. We didn't have the economic luxury of nineteenth-century gentlemen to stroll from café to café, and sip coffee while watching the world go by.

"I wish you could stay for longer," she said with regret. Perhaps then we would have unravelled our differences, and become reacquainted. But a few days was all I could afford. I had to get back to work. Time was money: someone else's.

The night before I left, after eating dinner at McDonalds (the cheapest place available), we snuck guiltily through the foyer of a fancy restaurant, to use the toilets, and admire the marble and the view. "Well, at least you can go out safely at night," I said. "To do what?" she replied wryly. And I realised the sad irony that – apart from the independently wealthy – those who can afford what Paris has to offer, probably seldom have the time, rushing from one thing to another. As Baudelaire observed in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*: "for businessmen … the fantastic reality of life becomes strangely blunted." And then again, as someone once said to me: "There's nothing worse than being poor in a rich country."

Slow Walk to Freedom

12 November 2002

I suppose by the law of averages it was my time. I was mugged again today. Though technically I'm not quite sure; like I assume rape means penetration, I always get the feeling mugged means there has to be actual – rather than just the threat of – violence involved. Is this accurate, or just South African perversity?

The first time I was attacked was December 1996, Hillbrow, Sunday 7pm. Preparing to go on holiday, I had been doing last minute work that weekend. My friend David had too, and so on the Saturday evening we walked home together from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Braamfontein where we worked, to Yeoville, through Hillbrow.

When we reached the park on the border of Hillbrow and Berea (most memorable at one time for the pigeon-lady, who could be seen on any given day covered in the pigeons she was feeding), we debated whether it would be more sensible to walk through it, or around it, and we decided that open streets were more conducive to safety than being fenced in. "What would you have to lose now if you were mugged?" David asked.

"Oh not much, just my life," I replied, thinking about the tedium of replacing ID documents and bank cards. But we reached our shared corner safely that evening, wished each other happy holidays, and went our separate ways.

Perhaps because of that, a false sense of security, or invincibility, denial, foolishness, I reasoned that the biggest thing I had to fear was own lack of trust, and decided not to call a taxi the following evening, and walked home on my own. Stopping off at the Hari Krishna restaurant for a take-away, I continued on around the park. By the time I realised the three men were converging on me, it was too late. "We want money," the one with the knife threatened. Mid-thirties, perhaps younger, prematurely aged. His accomplices holding me from behind, I didn't see more than their shapes. But his face

was close to mine, as he broke the chain with the labradorite crystal (*helps one remain calm within chaos*) around my neck, and I screamed rebelliously at his knife at my throat. They scattered, and I continued home with my curry, effectively shaken (*can't walk alone after dark anymore*, I thought); thinking about the month of paid leave ahead of me, and how the man with the dangerously desperate face now etched into my memory, had in all likelihood never been, and would never go on a holiday. (Was I being naïve?) I felt entangled in rage, and guilt, and a dark sadness.

But that was a long time ago, and had faded into a distant memory now, as I was confronted again with a knife in my ribs: "Give me your bag. Don't scream. Just cooperate, and we won't hurt you." Muggers seem to have become almost polite, and definitely more educated since my last encounter. And much younger. (But they still swarm, in threes.) Sixteen? Eighteen? It was hard to tell: disturbingly young.

Of course I couldn't be sure if he would stab me or not, but this time I wasn't taking any chances. Last time my rage and pride got the better of me, I was determined to be heard. This time there was nothing between me and the boys (*must remember to walk closer to the road*), and the German Shepherd, who was screaming louder than I ever could behind the suburban wall.

It's a pity dogs don't protect you when you're on the outside.

I had been happy this afternoon. I was walking home from a visit to the dentist, where thankfully she had managed to desensitise a tooth, and avoid having to pull it. Just a few blocks from the dentist I encountered something unusual for the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, an elderly white lady walking down the road very slowly, looking vulnerable but self-assured, with an umbrella, as though on an outing. I don't often encounter any other white pedestrians. Walking in Johannesburg seems to be a pastime of the poor or eccentric.

"Do you know where I can buy chocolate?" she asked. "I don't live here. I am staying with friends. I am alone there now – they can't baby-sit me all day long – but I suddenly have a craving for chocolate." How delightful, I thought. An elderly

woman, willing to step out into an unknown neighbourhood, and go on a little adventure all on her own.

“Do you know the Balfour Park Shopping Centre?” I asked.

“That’s a long way away.”

“No, just five or ten minutes. Do you want to walk with me?” So we walked, and talked.

“Are you from Israel?” I recognised the accent. Perhaps this accounted for her bravery. The rules change from one volatile city to another, but I expect the pragmatism of getting on with your life is the same.

“People don’t walk here,” she said.

“No,” I replied. “I think it’s partly a class thing.” (I didn’t mention safety. Was that irresponsible of me?) “But also the public transport is poor.” I recalled similar frustrations with public transport in Los Angeles years ago. Coincidentally, she had lived in LA for a few years it turns out, with her son and his family when he studied computer science there. We compared notes on the incredulous stares we got when out walking in the streets of LA.

Inevitably our talk turned to Israel. She was originally from Lebanon, and her family before that from Russia. “Is it safe to catch the buses in Israel?” I wondered. I remembered that my Israeli friend Shira had told me this is one of the first ports of call for suicide bombers. “You become vigilant,” said my walking companion. “Why is he wearing a jacket on a hot day like this? You notice. That’s how someone was stopped recently.”

We commented on the beauty of the purple rain falling from the jacarandas on the street. “It’s such a beautiful city. I hope it doesn’t go the way of the rest of Africa.”

Of course I should have known the conversation was going to veer in this direction, but I decided to sidestep some of these uneven and rocky bits. She was from another time and place, and I am trying to open myself to conversation with people who don't think quite like I do.

She told me the cousins she is staying with in South Africa say "the government is only interested in feathering its own nest".

"But isn't this true of most governments?" I wondered. "Isn't this true of George Bush?"

"How is it true of George Bush?" She was clearly confused. "He only wants freedom for everyone. Look how good he has been to Israel. He just wants to put an end to terrorism."

"He also wants control of oil in the Middle East," I said.

In response to her "Look at the rest of Africa," I tried to explain how it is in the West's interest to help put African dictators in power and keep them there. How things would have been different in the Congo, to name but one example, if Patrice Lumumba hadn't been assassinated. But there's only so much you can cover in fifteen minutes (we were walking slowly).

The closer we got to the shopping centre, the more it dawned on me that she would have to make this walk back on her own. She could be mugged and I would never know it. I recalled Lily Tomlin's character in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, who knocks over a child. She helps him up and he walks away. But she never knows that he goes into a coma later on. Do I remember correctly that he never wakes up from it? I don't read the newspapers. There could be a story about an elderly Israeli woman on holiday mugged and killed near Balfour Park Shopping Centre, and I would be none the wiser.

As we said goodbye, all she said was: "You have been very patient with me."

It is rare that I pray. But that was one of those moments. I prayed that she would get her chocolate, and wander home slowly and safely, with nothing more than her sweet tooth satisfied, and a tale of her adventure in the streets of Johannesburg. Quite selfishly, I had seen someone that I might become in her, and longed for the freedom to do so. But in the process, perhaps I had put her – and myself – at risk.

Never for one moment, did I dream as I waved goodbye, just how close that risk was.

I doubled my pace and crossed the street, and there they were waiting for me. Ironically I was more concerned with being startled by the aggressive suburban dogs. They bark ferociously every time, and every time I am taken by surprise. It called to mind something someone once said in a diversity workshop I was part of, about dogs in the suburbs only barking at black people. It's a myth.

It didn't cross my mind that there were three young men in different parts of the road, or that I should be wary of them.

So what did they take from me?

A beautiful bag made in Nepal (in all likelihood by workers under appalling conditions). An umbrella that folded down to just the right size. Sunglasses, new, in a purple case that I bought in London. Lipbalm, and a hand mirror. (Just yesterday I read Bukowski: *when women stop carrying / mirrors with them / everyplace they go / maybe then / they can talk to me / about / liberation*). A short story by Ivan Vladislavic, *The Box*, half read (the prime minister had just been let out of the bird cage where he was being held captive, and was about to give a speech. I wonder what he had to say.) A little bag of inspirational cards and a crystal that my friend Sophia sent me from Glastonbury. Keys and cards that gave me access to my home, the recreation centre, the university, and frequent flier mileage for escapism at the movies. Then of course, there was what they really wanted: a purse, with R180. Or was it R80? I have a feeling I might have spent the R100. Thank goodness not my bank card. And thank GOD not my phone book! Was it really worth the effort to them I wonder?

“I was not emboldened to leave the station until the sun was shining on everyone equally,” says Paul Theroux of his arrival at dawn at Park Station in Johannesburg, in his *Dark Star Safari*. A soldier trapped with Theroux in a highway robbery on his travels, offers him these words of comfort: “They do not want your life, bwana. They want your shoes.”

I had the sense that if I “cooperated”, I would not be harmed; a disturbing indictment of our society, cooperation having become an almost acceptable requirement from one’s attacker, rather than from the citizens of the society of one other. The saddest thing was that these boys did not seem to need my shoes, or my bag. They were well dressed and well spoken. They appeared to be relatively well educated. In short, they seemed like nothing more than spoiled brats, for whom a good hiding years ago, rather than a jail sentence now, would have made a difference. It called to mind Scott Peck’s: “Maybe we should condemn a little more and understand a little less.”

But I remind myself that the compassion I aim to cultivate is mostly for me, and in order to keep *me* human.

What those boys stole more than any thing, was not just from me, it was my trust given to the others also just walking peacefully down a quiet street, filled with jacarandas and bougainvillea on a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining on, and the dogs were barking at us all equally in that street. It’s such a shame they couldn’t see that.

For now, it’s back to the busy roads and exhaust fumes for me, and walking wide circles around people again for a while. But I’ll be walking.

Finding the Balance

1.

"Have you ever thought of moving to somewhere like Bloemfontein?" Gary asks. He's not being ironic. He left the country in 1985, and is trying to think of a place that may not have changed very much. He is back for one of many lightning visits, and we are sitting in the winter sunshine, at a pavement café in tree-lined Parkview, catching up, and inevitably discussing the stresses of living with crime in Johannesburg, and my mugging last year.

Gary didn't leave South Africa voluntarily. Like so many young white South African men at the time, he had the choice of fighting a war that he didn't believe in, going to jail, or leaving the country. Since his parents were British, and he had a British passport, Europe seemed the logical choice. Career-wise, as an international media consultant, he has never looked back, but he still has mixed feelings about his homeland.

He is here to rehearse a play that he's written, with a friend. They will perform it in London in a few months. But they've had to juggle both their schedules to synchronise a time and place to rehearse. Johannesburg, July 2003 it is.

Just then Sue walks by. I haven't seen Sue in half a dozen years, since she moved from Yeoville, from the block of flats that we shared. "Where are you living now?" I ask her.

"Up the road," she says. "But we're moving soon. To the Free State." Gary and I both laugh. She looks at us quizzically.

2.

My earlier memories of Sue call to mind the injunction from Chris-in-the-morning, the manic philosopher-DJ, to pilot Maggie in the TV series *Northern Exposure*: "You'd better slow down, or you'll catch yourself coming the other way." Sue seemed like someone on a mission. With a place to go, and her head down, it wasn't

easy to distract her from her path. She seems to have changed. “Well, in those days it didn’t seem important,” she says. “The whiteys in Yeoville didn’t really care if you greeted them or not. But now it’s different.” In the course of walking in the suburbs of Johannesburg now, apart from the few remaining ‘villages’, like Parkview and Norwood, it is rare to encounter other white pedestrians. Greeting, in a formerly racially divided society, is a simple act in building bridges. As a colleague of mine once put it: “When we greet, it means I am at peace with you.”

“When I lived in Cape Town years ago,” Sue continues, “I used to be more guarded. I used to think that people wanted something from me when they greeted me. That they wanted money or something. But things have changed.”

It strikes me as ironic that, at a time when many white South Africans feel overwhelmed by a growing economic underclass (largely pedestrian), and are suffering from compassion fatigue, and probably more likely to be wary of being solicited for money on the streets, she seems almost oblivious to this. But she is a massage and polarity therapist by profession, and addressing imbalances is her mission.

There are some who would argue that the entire act of walking is a balancing act. British anthropologist, John Napier, wrote that during walking “the body, step by step, teeters on the edge of catastrophe … because only the rhythmic forward movement of first one leg and then the other keeps [man] from falling flat on his face”.

For Sue, the speed of her movement has less to do with a need to get places fast, and more to do with her own internal rhythm. She feels, she says, “like a hummingbird”, and sitting still is hard. “The only time I’m comfortable being still, is when I’m with a client. Then my focus is completely on the client. Otherwise I need to keep moving, or doing something. Slowing down makes me feel like an elephant.”

“There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting,” wrote Milan Kundera. “The degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory.” And an elephant, they say, never forgets.

Though she does drive, and it would be faster, Sue often chooses to walk "from one side of Johannesburg to the other. It's so versatile," she says. "You can multi-task. I can think. And I find things!" The streets for her are a place for gathering overlooked treasures. This may also explain why she is so often looking down when she walks.

Working part-time at Congo Joe craft shop, to supplement her income, she has been walking from Parkview to Killarney, a 45-minute walk. But it's proving a bit much in the summer heat. "I arrive at work all hot and sweaty." So Steve, her partner, "has been very kind. He's been taking me and fetching me. Parking is such a nightmare at the Killarney shopping mall!" Parking problems and expenses are a complaint I hear over and over from drivers.

"I do have a sense of anxiety about having my car stolen … But the thing with Killarney … Well … I have this thing about chaos, and Killarney is the epitome of chaos. It's full of elderly people. And people don't stop their cars next to the ticket box when they're leaving, so someone has to come out of the cubicle and punch it for them, because they've stopped too far away, so they hold up the traffic. And when they're coming in, they get just past the boom, and stop and wait there for a parking place near the entrance. So nobody can get past. Nobody can get in, and nobody can get out. It can take you twenty minutes just to get out of the car park. It winds me up like nothing else."

Is she ever afraid for her safety when she walks around Johannesburg?

"No. Maybe because I've never been attacked. But I'm not afraid of other people. My fears are of my own demons … Of getting old, and slow, and being useless to anyone. But I can usually walk the fear off."

On Sundays she and Steve walk to the Rosebank Market. "And that's great. We don't have to find parking, or worry about the car. We watch all the building developments along the way. We're always harassing security guards to let us in to see. It's great to see what people are doing to their houses. I get ideas. And building rubble. I *love* building rubble. There are always interesting things lying in the street that you can bring home."

We are walking round her garden and she is showing me some of the things she has found. “Look at this beautiful old window that I got in the street outside the library. It must have been in the storeroom there. I’m going to use it in my house in the Free State. And I found, just now, this pile of beautiful old pressed-steel ceiling squares. I’ll make something out of them. I don’t know what yet.”

I look closely at the colourful mobile hanging in a tree nearby, that she’s made from bits and pieces she’s found. Plastic bags cut into strips; a milk carton; a snuff lid; chip packets; a hair curler; a scoop for baby’s milk formula; the lid of a Vim canister, already conveniently punched with holes to thread the string through; and a child’s abandoned slip-slop.

Mobiles, said Jean-Paul Sartre, “have no meaning, make you think of nothing but themselves ... A general destiny of movement is sketched for them, and then they are left to work it out for themselves.”

“When I’m making something like that,” says Sue, “I’m completely absorbed. It’s one of the few times I can sit for hours without budging. Because my senses are completely engaged. And occasionally when I’m watching a movie.”

“Which movie?” I ask her. “Off the top of your head.”

Babette’s Feast, she says immediately, recalling the 1988 film of Karen Blixen’s short story (originally published in the *Ladies Home Journal*). The film shows Babette preparing a magnificent, sumptuous meal, and must be the most sensual film ever made about food preparation.

“Oh look at this,” she leads me to a knobkierie planted in the garden. “My maid was a bit horrified. She said to me: ‘You don’t know who it belonged to!’ But I like it. Just feel that,” she says fingering the top of it. “Imagine how much handling and walking it took to make such a smooth surface.

“Sometimes we go out walking just for pleasure, for exercise, and I say to Stephen, ‘Let’s not come home until we find something!’ And we find amazing things. We knock on people’s doors as well, when they’ve got things outside their houses, and ask them if we can have them. So it’s nice … And sometimes we just knock on people’s doors and ask them what colour paint they’ve used, and then they’ll say: ‘Well, come in.’ And then we’ll get to see their house. And then we also sometimes on Sundays go and see show-houses.

“This was our big find,” she says with satisfaction, lifting a plastic sheet off a high pile next to a wall of the house. “About 60 square metres of parquet flooring. Somebody pulled all the parquet out of their house and threw it on the pavement. So we asked the security guard if we could have it. ‘Sure,’ he said, ‘just give me small change.’ We did trip after trip of full-to-the-roof bakkie loads. Hundred-year-old Rhodesian teak, going to the dump, for the price of a Coke!

“My maid gave me these. All her grandfather’s old enamel pots with holes in them. And I put plants in them. I’m interested in the transformation of old things into new things, and what you can really make with them. The mouldy old beauty of things that people have discarded.”

The pots are standing on a beautiful old dresser on the stoep, and the dresser, too, has a story. “That was one of the times we knocked on a door. All this stuff was standing on the pavement, and it turned out their granny had just died, and they’d come from somewhere up country to sort things out. They were only too happy for us to take it away.

“Steve and I are quite a good match, because I’ve got the ideas, and I want to do it, for free, and I want to do it quick. But Stephen’s technical, and he can do it slowly and properly, so if it wasn’t for him, everything in the house would be put up with a glue gun, masking tape, and a stapler.

“If Steve sees a hole in the wall, and it worries him, he’ll scrape it all down, fill it with Polyfilla, repaint it, and then it will disappear for him. I can fill it with toothpaste, and

I'll never think about it again. And if and when it falls down, which might not be in my lifetime, then I'll deal with it."

Steve is a photographer by profession. "His last exhibition was working with polaroid lifts, emulsions … You take a Polaroid picture, a certain kind of Polaroid, then you put it under water, and the image floats off into a kind of jelly, a tight little ball. Then you have to take a wet piece of paper, hand-made paper, put it underneath and catch it, and slowly open it up. Of course, it'll never be completely square again, but you try and get it as close to what it used to look like. The exhibition was called *Striving for Imperfection*," she laughs.

"If he was renovating the house, in his lifetime he'd do one door perfectly. It would be the most perfectly stripped and sanded door in the universe. I would do everything badly, but quickly. My feeling is even if we were going to be here for the rest of our lives, it's good enough for me. The next person's going to bash the house down, and turn it into something else, so what's the point?"

3.

Early next year Sue and Steve will be moving to Smithfield, which according to journalist Charmaine Naidoo, is "the Free State's best-kept secret". Only an hour from Bloemfontein, and yet until about seven years ago it had become a virtual ghost town. But two men passing through on the N6, and looking for a new place to settle, drove in, and began resuscitating the town.

"Frans and Julius," says Sue. "Frans is a fine artist, and Julius is a lawyer. They had been living as part of the artists' colony in the Sabie area, and had done very well with their restaurant and art gallery there. But they'd sold their business, and were looking for a new challenge. They bought a row of semi-detached cottages in the main road, and the magistrate's house. At that stage a house hadn't been sold in Smithfield for years, so the locals were delighted. Though they were a bit wary of the 'Engelse mense' in the beginning!

"Anyway they opened a bed and breakfast, and a restaurant. And all their friends started coming to town. People would come for a night, and end up staying the

weekend. They're very sociable; fabulous cooks, and great raconteurs. And they started a pottery project, too, training people from the area. And then word of mouth spread, and other artists and creative people started buying in the area.

I'm beginning to have visions of Cicely, Alaska, the little town featured in *Northern Exposure*. But without the radio station and the manic DJ. And a lot hotter.

"Oh, it can get very cold in Smithfield," Sue says. Sometimes in winter it goes as low as minus 12 degrees, it snows there; and in summer it gets to 35. It's actually remarkable that anyone wants to live there.

"But now that there are more and more toll roads, and the national road goes through there, and more people are taking that route …" *Halfway to Anywhere in South Africa* proclaims the ad for the Pula Guesthouse.

"We'd been holidaying in the Eastern Cape for a few years, and we always drove past there, and then one year we drove in. I can't say it was love at first sight. It's an awkward little town, but it's got little pockets of charm, and the people are delightful, and it grew on us. And the joke around town was that you could buy a house on your credit card without even going into budget."

Now, it seems, you can escape the congestion and traffic of big cities, to remote places accessible only by highways and cars. As architecture critic, Martin Pawley, says in praise of the car: the modern man and woman have "learned to live in the country. Today country life is entirely possible with a car."

Were Sue and Steve wanting to move from Joburg?

"No," she says. "But you know the opportunity presented itself, and I wanted to do it while we still have a choice. We're both almost fifty now, and we both freelance, and neither of us has a pension … I didn't want us to get to where we have no choices, and god forbid, can't even afford our rates and taxes. I've seen it with a lot of people around here."

Earlier this year, Sue started a campaign to have Parkview's electricity converted to the pre-paid system, which is "cheaper, and more manageable. Particularly if you have tenants." She didn't get the required number of signatures, but in the course of the campaign she heard numerous stories from pensioners who were "too scared to even put the heater on in winter. It was heartbreaking. I don't want to end up like that. At least this way we can rent out this house for a few years and get a small income while we find our feet in Smithfield, and eventually sell it."

Her mobile flutters in the September breeze, almost a mirage from the stoep where we're sitting, and I wonder silently if, in the vast distances that we now cover in a globalised world, and in order to find affordable housing, small country towns have become the new suburbs; and with all the Pam Golding estate agents' signs popping up all over the country, how long Smithfield will remain the Free State's "best kept secret".

So what does she plan to do in Smithfield?

"Well, I want to continue with the healing work. But I also want to start a community project. It might be possible to get a government grant. There are a few projects there, the pottery project and a knitting project, that have got grants.

"There's a woman called Betty West, a Zimbabwean woman, she had a knitting project in Zimbabwe that employed thousands of rural women. The most exquisite knitting and crocheting. Anyway, she's left Zimbabwe, and gone to Smithfield, and has been given a government grant to start a knitting project for all the little towns around there, Bethulie, Rouxville … But the funny thing is she's working in cotton, and it's sheep country. So I'm thinking definitely something with wool. My inclination is to make felt. Felt clothing. Felt making is very labour intensive, but not very skilled. So it's perfect for the area. It could provide jobs for a lot of people.

"And of course we'll be working on the house. It's almost falling down at this point (and there are bats in the ceiling!). It'll take time, but time is one thing we'll have.

“Who knows, maybe I’ll even learn to sit around and drink tea. It’s a common pastime there.

“It’s fitting that I’m moving to the area, because my father’s family were originally from there. ‘Boere-Jode’, from Colesberg in the Northern Cape; in the sheep industry. And my grandfather’s brother was a stockbroker. Literally, with stock: an auctioneer of sheep. Everyone from the farms around the area used to take their sheep for auction to Colesberg. It was the big centre. And it had the nearest shul, so on Jewish holidays all the Jews from the area would go there. And that was where my father was born. When he matriculated he couldn’t leave the countryside fast enough, he didn’t want to be a country boy, and he settled in Cape Town.

“But people want to visit small towns now, where their children can walk to the café and ride their bicycles. They can’t do that here,” she says with a sweep of her hand, “stuck behind high walls.”

“And the locals are loving it. There’s this really old man, Oom Jurie, he’s in his early eighties. He was the mayor before. Now he’s in his bakkie … and he’s become an estate agent. He’s got this formidable bunch of keys, he’s got keys to everyone’s houses.” (I imagine the bunch of keys she’s describing looks like the average householder’s keys in the suburbs of Johannesburg.) “You can phone him in winter and tell him you’re coming, and he’ll get your house ready for you.”

This reminds me of Jurie Steyn, the post-master in Herman Charles Bosman’s Groot Marico stories, who was thought by the locals to be steaming open their mail. No doubt there is an Oom Jurie in every small town.

“And we had a man running down the street to greet us when we arrived the one day,” Sue continues, “who said: ‘I saw your car. My name is Sedi, and I work in the municipality. I’ve been dealing with your accounts. I’m looking forward to you moving here.’”

In his 1945 essay, “Rebuilding Europe’s Cities”, Bosman wrote: “The difference between the city and the farm is, alas, age old. The city has gutters.” While myths

about big bad “Joh’burg” – which “flourished on vandalising and extinguishing its own past”, as Stephen Gray put it – proliferated amongst Bosman’s characters in his Marico stories, the truly mythical Marico “hovered on the fringes of [his Joburg readers’] world, as a fantastic remoteness”. Bosman chronicled the migration from the rural to the urban. Now it seems to be time for chronicling the move back to the country. I can see Sue sitting on a stoep, not unlike this one, telling stories. Though how long it will remain “the country” is a big question.

It is time for me to leave, and Sue walks with me up to the main road where I’m to meet my taxi driver. On the way we see a star shining up at us from between a pile of new bricks. She reaches down and pulls it out. “You see!” she laughs. It’s a completely silver Christmas tree, made of barbed wire, tinsel, candle holders and tin stars. “Oh, I can definitely do something with this.”

In the Footsteps of Bosman and Dickens, via Hillbrow

‘“Kaffirs? (said Oom Schalk Lourens). Yes, I know them. And they’re all the same. I fear the Almighty, and respect his works, but I could never understand why he made the Kaffir and the rinderpest. The Hottentot is a little bit better. The Hottentot will only steal the biltong hanging out on the line to dry. He won’t steal the line as well. That is where the Kaffir is different. Still, sometimes you come across a good Kaffir, who is faithful and upright and a true Christian and who doesn’t let the wild dogs catch the sheep. I always think it isn’t right to kill that kind of Kaffir.”’

This is Phaswane Mpe, author of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, quoting from memory the beginning of *Makapan’s Caves*, the first Herman Charles Bosman story he read as a teenager and one that remains a favourite. I am a little shocked. I can hardly bring myself to say the K-word out loud, let alone repeat it over and over, and I was never at the receiving end of apartheid’s brutality.

“I don’t think words in themselves are bad,” says Phaswane. “I’m more interested in how those words get used. We need to distinguish between insults and ironies.”

I have a feeling Phaswane would like Sixties American comedian Lenny Bruce, who said: “Satire is tragedy plus time. You give it enough time, the public, the reviewers will allow you to satirize it.”

For the majority of South Africans, though, there has not been enough time, and just a few years ago a schoolteacher was dismissed when parents accused him of setting a “racist” exam paper based on Bosman’s story *Unto Dust*.

But Phaswane is able to laugh. He laughs a lot.

“I think it may have something to do with my experience of apartheid,” he says. “I didn’t experience it in the same way, for example, that people in Soweto experienced it. I was living in a rural village, Ga-Molepo, about 50km to the south-east of Pietersburg, in the Northern Province. And most of the terrible things I heard on the

radio, rather than actually coming into direct contact with them. Apart from Bantu education, I experienced it indirectly. Part of what that did for me, I think, is that I never developed bitterness. I just thought about it as something that we needed to do away with, and move on."

A teacher who introduced Phaswane to Bosman has been one of the most positive influences in his life. She is the Catholic nun, Sister Mary Anne Tobin, to whom *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is dedicated.

"Our school library wasn't very well stocked, so my introduction to literature was really through Enid Blyton, particularly the *Famous Five* series. I read almost everything in that series. I liked George, and Timmy the dog. I also had a dog that I was very close to. I could relate to the characters on an emotional level.

"Then I read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and I found it a great book. I keep on going back to it. I loved the magical nature of the characters, which spoke to my enjoyment of folk tales and, on another level, its subversive humour. Mary Anne moved me away from Enid Blyton when she introduced me to Herman Charles Bosman. And from there I moved on to Charles Dickens."

It was the opening passage of *Great Expectations* that captured his imagination: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip."

"I don't know exactly what it was," says Phaswane. "I suppose part of it is just the confidence of the child. Knowing what he cannot do, but being able to improvise and feeling that he's doing it well. Achieving great success at something that seems so small."

In 1988, at the age of 17, during the school holidays Phaswane visited Johannesburg for the first time. "I never got to Hillbrow that year. There were bomb scares in town, and my brother and cousin wouldn't hear of me going there. So it was a very dull three weeks I spent in Highlands North where I was staying with my brother. I was

very bored. There wasn't much that was exciting in the street. People were very quiet, and I'm not a great fan of shopping centres. I didn't know at the time that I could use the library."

The following year Phaswane moved to Joburg to attend Wits University, and though *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is not autobiographical, the walk the novel's hero, Refentše, makes – from Vickers Place to the campus in Braamfontein – is the walk Phaswane made daily as an undergraduate when he lived in Hillbrow. These days he lives in Braamfontein, and doesn't have far to go to get to campus while he does his doctorate, but he is still committed to walking. "I think I'm a great walker partly because I had to walk; there was just no other way out. And so walking became both a necessity and a pastime. If there's a distance that I can walk I prefer to walk. I want to see the world around me. It's how I find my stories," he says.

"The thing that strikes me about walking is that, no matter how often you travel one route, you always observe something new every time. It might be a very small detail, which at the time perhaps doesn't matter. After a couple of days, a couple of weeks, months, perhaps even years, it just comes back to you, and during the course of time it has become so significant, without you making an effort to make it significant.

"At one time on my walks through Hillbrow there was something like a dog kennel outside the city shelter. And then they moved it. Now that corner of Kotze and Hospital Streets is sort of changed for me. When something changes, that's been part of your consciousness, it's as though you're walking a slightly different route, now that the familiar landmark is no longer there.

"I'm very bad with dates. If I write something, I tell a story. As long as I know I got the sequence right, I don't care very much about the exact time. I want to concentrate more on the meaning of place for me. I tend to use incidents and events to locate myself in terms of time. You never know at what point an event or an incident will become significant in your own life. And it's mostly only in hindsight – with the exception of the things you have planned for, and if you don't achieve them, they become significant because of your failure!" he laughs as an afterthought.

“But place, of course, has a lot to do, not just with the landmarks, but with the people who are in that place. And your experience of meeting those people. The social interaction. Your experience of those interactions. When I began writing the book I initially thought I was just doing a portrait of Hillbrow. And I realised as I started working on the map, that actually I can’t have a map with no one to move around in it. That’s how I ended up putting Refentše into the map.”

Refentše was a character from Phaswane’s earlier short stories. In one of them, “Occasion for Brooding”, Refentše had committed suicide, so Phaswane decided to “resurrect” him by having the book’s narrator in dialogue with the deceased. His use of the word “resurrect”, and his friendship with Sr. Mary Anne, make me wonder if he’s religious.

“There are things about Christianity I don’t agree with,” he says. “One of my biggest problems is the idea of original sin. I just can’t accept that I’m born a sinner, so I’m not Christian. I became aware as I was growing up that increasingly I was going to church because I wanted to meet my friends there, and I realised I could make arrangements to meet them after church. And then at some point I decided there’s no God, but I’ve sort of changed my mind. Now I’m not sure. Either way it doesn’t actually bother me. I believe in the power of the ancestors. I subscribe to elements of Christianity, and elements of traditional belief; I think they both have their own limitations. Maybe I’m just an opportunist,” he laughs. “I like the Bible as a collection of stories, though. I think it’s great.

“In one of his essays, on why black South Africans shouldn’t really care about being called ‘Kaffir’, Bosman points out that the word actually means unbeliever; it was only at a later stage that it began to accumulate these political meanings, so we should be thankful for not being associated with conservative Christianity.

“I think what I particularly like about Bosman is the way he captures the complexity of the rural mentality. The prejudices and gems of wisdom.” This mentality, that feeds so much on second- and third-hand stories, often mythology, is something Phaswane explores at length in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.

When I ask him how he deals with issues of safety while walking in the inner city, he reminds me that, like Refentše, he had been warned often about the dangers before he left home, and while Hillbrow is not quite the "menacing monster" he'd been told to expect, he too has had his share of violent experiences. "I've had several," he says, as though this is completely normal. And then proceeds to list a number of incidents, all cellphone-related.

There was a line in *Skin Deep*, a recent play at the Market Theatre, where one of the young women asks if a potential lover has "the three c's": a car, a cellphone, and a credit card. This is what will make him successful in her eyes. Though probably to muggers, cash is still king.

"When they took my first cellphone, they had guns," Phaswane continues. "That was in the daylight. The second time they had knives. But my third cellphone was quite an interesting case. I actually felt I wasn't safe, so I decided to catch a cab. The driver called someone over, and I thought he was just saying goodbye to his friend. I had the door open, and was about to get in when this guy, the taxi driver's friend, took out a knife and robbed me and the driver just kept quiet. In the end I didn't get into the car, I went back to drink, where I'd left my friends at my drinking hole.

"If I'm carrying a lot of money, I'll carry it in a book. For some reason criminals don't like books," he laughs. "There was one day, I had just come back from Germany, where I received a stipend, so I ended up not having to use my own money. I had about €1 000. I carried it inside *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass, which I was reading at the time, and walked quite safely to deposit it in the bank."

If not conventionally religious, he is fatalistic. "I walk through Hillbrow at any time of the day or night," he says. "If it's your turn, it's your turn."

Perhaps this is influenced by coming from a rural area, where nature can be more of a threat than one's fellow man. One of the biggest dangers in the wide open space, while walking, is lightening. "Shortly after I wrote my first short story, "Brooding Clouds", a story about witchcraft and lightning," he says, "my mother got struck by

lightning. She wasn't fatally injured, but nevertheless I started feeling guilty, and I put the story in my briefcase for a while before it was published."

On the question of owning a car, Phaswane says, he has no need. "I've been teaching at the university, so I don't have far to travel. And if I need to travel a long distance for any reason I catch a cab. But when I do travel long distances, it's usually to far off places, where I use a plane," he adds, without a trace of irony.

In 1997 he spent nine months in Oxford doing a diploma in publishing studies. He didn't realise that this was the home of Lewis Carroll, author of the *Alice in Wonderland* that he so loved, but a friend, knowing his love of Dickens, invited him to visit London for a few days. "I went to see the Old Curiosity Shop. I didn't recognise anything in London from Dickens' work, not in a physical sense anyway, but I did have some sort of emotional response, which worked wonders for me, because I didn't actually like London. It's too congested and too busy for my liking. Hillbrow is congested," he adds, "but there's a lot of social life in Hillbrow. I didn't feel that in London. There's a lot of busyness, but …," he trails off, hinting at a loneliness in the London crowd that is very different from Africa.

Bosman once related a story of meeting a South African on a bench in Hyde Park, who "told me the funniest Afrikaans story I have ever heard. It was about a predikant and the district drunkard. Afterwards, I thought much about the man. I wondered how long he had been there, sitting on that park bench, in childlike faith that some day a stranger would come past who would know about the veld and who would listen to his story." And then he continued in customarily irreverent fashion: "It's queer how London always seems to lead the world in art and literature… Here I have to come all the way to London, to Hyde Park, to hear the world's best Afrikaans story."

Bosman's years abroad, it is said, "seemed to offer less of the stimulus of a fresh environment than a re-affirmation of love for his old one". Though Phaswane has travelled a fair amount, I get the impression the same may be true for him.

Back home Phaswane realises that he may at some point be forced to learn to drive. "I've not had a strong motivation to do it. But I may one day end up working far from

Braamfontein, and then it will become unavoidable. Public transport in South Africa, if you are under time constraints," he concedes, "can be a problem.

"The only people who have responded with a sense of surprise when I tell them I don't drive have been my students. 'We thought you were successful,' they say. But from very early on I defined success in my own terms, by the kind of things I *do*, rather than what I don't do. That's another thing I got from Mary Anne. If I had followed what others have told me constitutes success, I'd probably have stopped teaching much earlier, and done something that made a lot more money."

Commenting on his doctoral thesis, on representations of sexuality in post-apartheid literature, he says: "I particularly like K Sello Duiker's novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, because it deals with issues of black homosexuality, black identity and masculinity, but he does it in a way that takes homosexuality for granted. In a context in which many people argue that homosexuality is a white man's disease. I like the honesty with which he treats the issues."

Throughout our conversation, his two-year-old daughter, Reneilwe, has been peacefully sleeping in his lap. She stirs, and our attention is brought back to the room; to the sun fading outside his office window. It is time to get the little girl home. He gathers her things together, picks up his cellphone, and prepares for their walk, ready for any stories they might encounter on the way.

This interview took place shortly before Phaswane's sudden death on 12 December 2004.

Tragically, K Sello Duiker – whom Phaswane mentions in the interview – committed suicide just a month later.

A Cappella

It was midnight. The room was dark and smoky when four voices appeared on stage, in perfect synch, from Bach to Led Zepplin, capturing the imagination of the audience, and proving George Milaris wrong. He was the owner of the Black Sun cabaret venue in Berea, who had said (Greek accent): "No tits, no arse – it'll never work. Just a bunch of people singing around a microphone and telling silly jokes. But, OK, you wanna make fools of yourselves, I'll give you the midnight slot for the next two weeks." And so, Not the Midnight Mass was born. After the performance they passed around a hat for collection.

That was 1988. Since then the voices from that night have scattered. After twelve years in New York, dramatic mezzo, Natalie Gamsu, now lives and sings in Sydney. The unmistakeable bass, Alan Glass, the only one who remains in Joburg, is a businessman and children's songwriter. (George Milaris is in Sydney, too.) But Not the Midnight Mass, after many incarnations with brother and sister Graham and Christine Weir at its core, is still going strong, now delighting a new generation in Cape Town, where they both live.

Graham is a dedicated walker. He lives in a beautiful old building, Victoria Court, which was saved from demolition at the last minute by a petition, and is home to a number of artists. Situated at the top of now trendy Long Street, right next door to the Long Street Baths, it is one of the most pedestrian friendly areas of Cape Town.

"Often if I'm working on a song, or writing a story, I take a walk," he says, "and it comes to me while I'm walking. Ideas formulate while I'm walking. I use walking as a time to meditate, and realign my body. If I'm in the mountains, I chant as I walk. Buddhist chants. They give me a rhythm. Or if I'm around here, in the city, I just meditate on the walking. It motors me along. Seeing the left, the right, the left, the right … Putting my feet down squarely on the ground. It carries me along. To me it's a constructive time, an unwinding time. It's very different when you drive a car, you're constantly edgy.

“I’m a streetwise walker, so I walk with my antennae up. I’m not scared. There *are* gangs in the city, particularly street kid gangs, but I’ve never been harassed when I walk. My mother was mugged at twelve o’clock on a Saturday afternoon walking in the city centre,” he adds. “But generally I don’t feel at all unsafe from gangs and people. I walk fairly often in the city centre and don’t feel any threat. I feel more threat from motorists, actually,” he laughs.

“My particular gripe is that more and more people come to a red robot in their cars, and instead of coming to a full stop and engaging the handbrake, they start edging forward. Eventually the whole car is over the pedestrian line, and the next car is already edging its way forward, and you have to work your way round these cars. Here in town, because the laws aren’t enforced (it’s a 60 kilometre zone), people drive along Orange Street and Long Street sometimes at 120 kilometres an hour, so it makes it hard for pedestrians to judge. If you’re in Orange Street, for instance, and you’re halfway along and you want to cross, and you look up and see a car coming, if people are keeping to the speed limit, you’d be able to get across, but you’re often uncertain because people are coming at you at ridiculous speeds. Motorists constantly treat pedestrians like vermin they can bump out of the way. It’s unbelievable. People resent having to slow down.”

Los Angelean essayist and pedestrian, DJ Waldie, describes the combat zone between drivers and pedestrians: “… traffic safety trainers suggest that pedestrians stare at drivers.… The theory is that human beings are quick to sense when someone is staring at them -- a common primate threat behavior -- and a driver who’s stared at will react unconsciously as if the pedestrian is real. My belief that staring actually works is my only protection.”

But sometimes that is not enough. “One Saturday night recently, it was bedlam here in Long Street,” says Graham. “At about 9.30 pm, I was crossing over Orange to Long with the pedestrian light green in my favour, and a man roared around the corner right at me. I stopped dead still. So did he – a foot from me. I pointed to the green man with deft articulate gesticulations, and went on my way. I decided to cross at Lolas café. I looked towards the oncoming traffic, and the way was clear, so I stepped into the road

– and felt something bash into my hip. A reversing car lifted me onto its boot, but not before I had gouged a mark on it, banging till he stopped!"

Though Graham doesn't own a car at the moment, he does drive, and knows about life on both sides of the windscreen. He likens it to someone who's worked as a waiter: "Then you know what it's like when you eat at a restaurant. But I don't think the majority of people in this town ever set foot on the pavements. Most of them, the only place they walk is in the shopping malls."

When his car – which he had for a year and a half, his first in 15 years – began to develop problems, and started to become more trouble than it was worth, "I knew it was going to cost me money I didn't have, so I decided to get rid of it. A lot of people are buying flats in the city centre, and in Long Street you don't have a place to park. You don't get residence permits or anything like that. Some people park in the church across the street, but a lot of people don't get space to park. For me it became such a hassle because the City Council brought in these by-laws where, between 8 and 5 o'clock if your money's run out in the parking meter, they clamp your wheels and tow your car away, so I'd have to get up at 7 o'clock before rush hour starts and go and move my car to Orange Street, where there are no parking meters. And then I'd have to be back at about seven at night, before the revelry started outside in Long Street, so it actually became a nuisance having a car.

"The only reason I'd have a car now would be to get out of town at weekends, to Tulbagh or Piketberg, where I have friends with farms. It's difficult sometimes, when time is short, and I have to go somewhere like Constantia, that's not on the railway line, and the minibus stops about a half hour's walk from where I have to get to. But during the day things are mostly accessible by public transport.

"When I go to yoga at 5 o'clock in the evening, I walk through the Gardens, down Adderley Street to get a minibus to Sea Point, and that's wonderful. There are lots of people out, and lots of things to see, squirrels, office workers going home, tourists in the summer."

He zooms in closer: “As an actor, I find I’m always imitating people’s walks. Watching people walk is a fascinating indication of where they’re at mentally, and where they hold their tension. When a person carries all their tension in their chest for example, and therefore their left shoulder is hunched, and therefore the right foot moves further forward than the left … Some people hold their tension in their groin, and push their groin forward. People with short hamstrings tend to stoop forward, and walk looking at the ground.”

A walk then, like a laugh, or one’s handwriting, becomes a signature, making our mark across space.

“If your chin is parallel with the ground,” he continues, “you can take in the whole universe, and therefore you’re going to have a state of mind where your chest is filling, but the minute you get depressed, everything starts collapsing, and you start seeing the world like a horse with blinkers on. The more vivacious and outgoing someone is, the more of the world they see.

“I’m often late for things because I stop to watch people, and how they interact,” he says. “Particularly *bergies*. I find their way of walking fascinating. And old people. There’s a chap who lives at the old age home, in about his late seventies. He’s suddenly started using a stick. He’s always in his suit, and he’s a pub-crawler. His last port of call is the Labia cinema next door, where he has a glass of red wine. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon I see him wandering around by himself. One thing I will say about when I first came to Cape Town, I was quite amazed at how many more old people I saw in the streets. It’s lovely seeing old people out for a walk.

“And the people who live on the streets, you get to know about them and their lives. There’s a wonderful lady who lives in the park at the moment. She always calls me Freddy. Her name is Sylvia. She’ll tell you stories about her life. ‘For a small fee’,” he laughs. As someone who earns his living as an entertainer, Graham is happy to support her.

“She says, ‘Come talk to me, come talk to me …’” he mimics, in a high-pitched voice. “I can never remember any of her stories, but they’re very amusing at the time.

I think it's more her personality and her way of talking that's interesting. She'll say weird things, like she'll point to the guy who's with her, a white guy, and say: 'Shame, he's mixed race you know.'" It would seem that Sylvia herself, in old South African race classification terms, is "coloured".

"You also pay more attention to detail when you walk. Every time I walk out here I see something new. I often get transfixed. The buildings in Cape Town are so beautiful. Particularly in Long Street, many of the buildings are national monuments, and around the older areas of town. The detail in the architecture is quite amazing. So I often walk around like a tourist, spending my time looking up at the buildings.

"I could only live in the country or the city centre. I could never live in suburbia. To me there's nothing more depressing than having to get in the car to go to the shop. Here I can walk to any number of restaurants or coffee bars. I can walk to an art gallery around the corner, or the Labia cinema within a few blocks, or the Gardens, Greenmarket Square.

"The one place I avoid is the Waterfront. There's no way to walk there without going over a massive highway. If you go down Buitengracht Street there's a five-lane highway. All around the International Conference Centre, that whole area where all the big hotels are, is in amongst highways. It's absurd. So there's a massive divide between the tourist area and the city centre. In a way, actually I think it's a good thing," it seems to just occur to him, "because it's kept the false trappings of the Waterfront away from the charm of the city.

"It's a bit like walking in Sandton," he says, referring to the Joburg suburb which has replaced the city centre as its central business district, and is known globally for playing host to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. WSSD 2002 became known simply as "Sandton", as the summit before it was "Rio".

It's fair to speculate that many of the delegates of WSSD rarely left the area. On the few occasions I get to Sandton (not easily accessible by public transport), I always have the feeling there should be signs up saying: "You are now leaving Sandton." Its residents seem content to work, play and shop within its confines. There is little

reason to leave, and to be confronted by the harsher economic realities that lie just outside its borders.

"I spent a week in Sandton last year when we went up with Midnight Mass," says Graham, "and I felt stuck there. It was very depressing. You couldn't walk anywhere. There are no pavements really. The only place to go is Sandton City, which is horrible," he says, referring to Joburg's largest shopping centre. "All the office buildings have tinted windows, and they're all set back in the road behind hedges and security fences and awful architecture. So there's a bleak pavement, and nothing to see when you're walking there, except the cars, until you get to the shopping centre."

When you get to Nelson Mandela Square, alongside Sandton City, there is the six metre bronze statue of Nelson Mandela to see, and be photographed underneath.

Lost one day in Sandton City (not so named for nothing), I asked a shop assistant the way back to Sandton Square. "Which hotel are you staying at?" he asked, assuming I must be a tourist. Why else would I be lost? Finally, coming out into the street in front of one of the conveniently situated hotels, a porter in colonial top hat and tails greeted me: "Good day, Ma'am." A sign less of old South African racial deference, it would appear (he, too, seemed to think I was a tourist – why else would I be on foot?) than the growing global class system.

British sociologist, Paul Gilroy, commented when he was in South Africa on the renaming of the former Sandton Square to Nelson Mandela Square: "People [are] trying to invest the experience of shopping with the moral gravity that it should never hold and should never be asked to bear … to try to infuse that with the iconic heroic figure of Mandela seems a good symptom of where the critique of capitalism goes at a time when it is impossible to articulate it.

"I think it is shocking, but interesting, that they think of it as a brand asset, that they think they can borrow that life to build their brand. And if you think also that these private spaces are placeless, it could be anywhere in the world, and they cater largely for a shopping clientele which is also not affected, which is floating. It's about trying to tell these people they are in South Africa, when they just as well might not be."

“I get the impression in Johannesburg people think you must be poor if you’re walking,” Graham continues, “whereas in Cape Town I don’t think that’s the case. In the city centre, Sea Point, Observatory, people walk all the time. Also, I suppose, because of the beach. But walking as recreation is one of the greatest things. It’s wonderful exercise. You’re getting fit, and getting fresh air and stimulation, and seeing things.”

Like so many of the avid walkers I talk to, Graham rarely watches TV. He doesn’t own a set. As early as 1951 Ray Bradbury predicted that television would be the death of walking. In Bradbury’s short story, “The Pedestrian”, Leonard Mead, the last remaining pedestrian in 2053, whispers to the flickering shadows behind the curtains of the houses that he walks by: “What’s up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?”

At the time Bradbury wrote this story, Bhutan, the isolated little kingdom in the Himalayas, shrouded in mystery, and known to the outside world as Shangri-la, did not yet have paper currency. By 1999 they became the last country on earth to get television, and by 2002, along with their first crime wave, walking was becoming a thing of the past, too. Says Sangay Ngedup, minister for health and education: “We used to think nothing of walking three days to see our in-laws. Now we can’t even be bothered to walk to the end of Norzin Lam high street.”

“To me one of the most terrifying things about the modern age,” Graham picks up, “is the way that people seem scared of silence. My nephew used to watch the cartoon channel: %&*@ $%#! …,” he imitates *Road Runner* sound effects. “You eventually want to throw yourself off the building. In the gym they’ve got these big screens, and music blaring. Any exercise you’re doing, you should be aware of what your body’s doing. So if you’ve got headphones on, sure you’re getting fit, but you’re not in touch with your body.

“It’s amazing, if you go onto the beach and look around, you see how many people are talking on their phones at any one time. And in restaurants, or even just on the

pavement. In another time, they would have been relaxing, but now they're all caught up in that. Even at urinals I see people talking on the phone next to me. It's totally mad."

In his article "Remember the Sabbath", encouraging people to take one day (any day) off a week from buying and selling, technology writer, Douglas Rushkoff, describes a TV commercial "in which a young executive conducts a business meeting over a cellular phone – while standing at a urinal. When it comes time to zip up, he cradles his cell phone on his shoulder and goes on talking. But then the phone slips out from under his chin, and tumbles – splash – you guess where. The answer to this dilemma, according to the ad, is a new 'hands-free' cellular phone service." Rushkoff concludes with a compromise: "Is a whole day too much to ask? Okay … Just promise not to take the telephone into the bathroom."

"Younger actors had cellphones long before I did," Graham continues. "I caught up late. But when people want you to do a voice over, they want to get hold of you *now*. If you don't keep up you lose work. The young actors even shoot clips of themselves on CD. They're very sussed in that regard. When they're not, they're considered out to lunch."

Admitting that he has no television (and no wife), Bradbury's pedestrian is taken off by the police to "The Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies".

Returning our attention to Cape Town, Graham reflects: "I think they can slow everything down, and they should. They should make Long Street into a pedestrian mall. There is talk of it. Clean out the cars and make the entire city centre into pedestrian walkways. Vehicles can come in before 9 o'clock in the morning, make their deliveries, and then get out, the way they do at St George's Mall. Look at St George's Mall, the whole place changes. People are relaxed, they're not bumping into each other. There's less commotion and friction, because people aren't pushing each other off the pavement to get down the street. If they did that and introduced cycles and rickshaws, it would make much more sense than all of this jostling for space.

“They can keep Buitengracht and those streets on the perimeters of the city centre as car-ways. I think it would help a lot if we had all-night trains, and the trains were secure. Also that would cut down on drunk drivers. People could catch a train to the city centre and walk to Long Street and come and *jol*, then get a rickshaw back to the station if they don’t want to walk.

“To me rickshaws make a lot of sense, because first of all, with the unemployment rate we have in this country … People say it would be exploitation of poor people. But at least it’s something they could do. It would employ hundreds of people, and be better for the environment. And everyone would slow down a pace.”

Talk of rickshaws recalls his time in India. “Everyone hoots all the time, and the trucks and the buses push the cars out the way, and the cars push the tuck-tucks out the way, and the tuck-tucks push the bicycles out the way, and the bicycles push the pedestrians out the way, and the pedestrians push the animals out the way. And the animals all end up in the middle of the road. There’s a thin concrete island that runs down the centre of the road, and a long line of cows, dogs and chickens lie along it sleeping, unperturbed by the mayhem. But on Independence Day, I couldn’t believe how quiet it was. I took a walk along the beachfront in Mumbai, and hardly a car was moving. The city was so pleasant suddenly. There was time and space to look at the architecture.”

Of course in India, as someone once pointed out to me, hooting is not an aggressive act. It is saying, “watch out, I’m coming”, rather than “fuck off out of my way”, as it generally is in South Africa. In a country where weapons are common, cars are used as weapons, too, in incidents of road-rage. “I’m sure the average person who chooses to walk,” says Graham, “is less likely to have a gun, or a weapon of any kind.”

There is a neglected and growing underclass on Long Street, though, amidst the backpacker hostels and trendy nightspots. “There’s no doubt about the fact that the street kids are dangerous. As much to themselves, and each other, as to anyone else. I saw one of them stab someone to death outside the 7Eleven a few years ago. I didn’t know that’s what they were doing at the time. It was early evening, and the guy was waiting at the gate. I thought they were just pulling at his jersey. They were only

about seven or eight years old. And the next morning in the paper I read that they'd murdered someone, and I confirmed that it was him. And another time they stabbed someone at the garage on the corner, in the spine, and paralysed him. They get out of their heads on glue, and then they're quite fearless."

Tourists are often the worst hit. "Tourists tend to stop and talk to them, which residents don't. And the minute you stop and talk to one, they surround you in a flock. Also tourists are often walking around with big bags and hats that spell 'Tourist'. And they're stupid enough to open their bags, to hand over a coin, and then that's it. So the kids pretty much know who to attack."

In the end, though, Graham is pragmatic. "Ultimately, hopefully, it's about … One has a choice to live life fearfully or to live life joyfully, and someone can come and mess up your life by stabbing you in the spine, but maybe no one will, and you've gone through your whole life worrying that you might be stabbed or you might be attacked. Or you can walk, and you see things, and enjoy life, and until such time as something goes wrong … It's a choice, and the more people who choose fear, the more fearful the society becomes, and the more people who choose freedom, the more free the society becomes. And I think walking is one of those things that most symbolises that feeling. If you choose not to be part of the fearful mindset …"

Our conversation is interrupted by the phone ringing: a friend has arrived to fetch Graham for rehearsal.

Outside in the sunshine, as I say a quick hello to Bo, waiting in the car, we muse on the inevitable contradiction, that it is liberating to not own a car, but it's always a blessing having friends who do.

Fast Forward

Gary Carter lives in Amsterdam, with Marius, his partner of twenty years, and their son, Lucio. The interview took place via e-mail in the air between London and Amsterdam.

Q. By way of introduction, how would you describe yourself, and the work that you do?

A. Hmm. I'd describe myself as an artist, but that's not particularly helpful. It's important, though, because that's how I conceive of myself and my approach to everything I do, even the bits that aren't art.

I have two careers – the one is as a theatre practitioner and performer, making text-based multi-discipline performance pieces, and the other is as a media executive. The latter is where I earn my living, and the discrepancy between the two fields of operation is enormous.

As a media executive, I work on the continuum of idea development, acquisition and distribution. That is to say, I am involved on a day-to-day basis with the origination of patterned ideas for non-scripted entertainment television shows, and their related business and legal affairs. My career has been focussed around the rise of Reality Television.

I currently work with FremantleMedia, the global production and distribution company which makes, amongst other things, *Pop Idol* and *The Apprentice* worldwide.

Q. What made you call your consultancy company 'Field'?

A. I chose the name Field because of its multiplicity of meanings: as a fertile space in which things can grow; a field of research; a field of expertise; as a defence (in the

sense of 'to field a blow'). The latter because at the time, having come out of a brutal and punishing five years with Endemol, another production company, I felt the need for some protection …

Q. Where are you based now?

A. I live in Amsterdam, and work all over the world: however, I spend three days a week (mostly) in London, at the head office of FremantleMedia. Since January, I have been working exclusively with FremantleMedia, as Senior Executive Worldwide Television.

Q. For some frequent flyers, the time in the air is some of the only time they have for themselves … do you find this time relaxing, or do you find travelling tiring?

A. In a general physical sense, I find it debilitating physically, mentally and emotionally. By that I mean, I think air travel takes an enormous physical toll – the inactivity, the discomfort, the lack of air, the food – but also an emotional toll. I find it difficult to be passive, and air travel, particularly if you do it frequently, requires a degree of passivity because you are powerless to really impact what's happening to you (although it does help once you understand the routines, the excuses and the coding of signs around you). On the other hand, because my life is very public, and because I am exposed to almost 24 hour contact via a host of electronic devices, aeroplanes represent a kind of liberation, or privacy.

Q. You once said you didn't think the body was designed to move at the speed of the frequent flyer's life … Do you still feel that? How do you manage it?

A. I believe that more and more. One of the primary things connects to the emotional toll I mentioned above: I think that the body and the mind require processing and transition times between events, and I think air travel is too fast for that to happen adequately. I manage it through the gathering of a long succession of tricks and tics which probably make me appear increasingly eccentric and irritating to my fellow travellers – but one of the ways I manage is to be less concerned about what my

fellow travellers think. So I always travel long distances in a rather unbecoming cotton track suit. I drink vast amounts of water (which means I am forever in the toilet!). I pace up and down. I use eyedrops. I cover my face in calendula oil. I don't eat aeroplane food (no! not even in First Class). I don't drink. I exercise before and after a flight, where possible. I meditate. I do ballet exercises. Oh yes. On the plane, I do them …

Q. Do you prefer flying to driving/travelling in a car?

A. That's not a fair question. I dislike both. Driving myself makes me less irritated and keeps me active (as opposed to passive).

Q. Any fears of flying? Any more since September 11?

A. I am very pragmatic about the chance of accident – it's part of the passivity I mentioned earlier. However, when I do take off, I always send a mental message to my partner that I love him, and always will, no matter what. He knows that too. When I land, I phone him and tell him I'm safe. That – the phoning – started after September 11, at his request. The impact on me has been that I keep my passport on my body in the air, along with a mobile phone – the phone in case I need to try to make contact, and the passport so that my body can be identified …

Q. You lived in LA for a year, working for Disney. Did you drive then? Did you enjoy living in LA?

A. I drove then, yes, you can't not in LA really, unless you live in one suburb only. I drove an open coupé and wore a cowboy hat, and listened to Sheryl Crowe (this was 1996). LA is built to be seen from a car, to be experienced from a car, and Californian music really is the soundtrack to the city as experienced from a car, so it's somehow appropriate there. I still drive when I go to Los Angeles, there is a relief to arriving in a foreign city and knowing it well enough to do that. But it is a special experience in a car – try driving along the length of Mulholland Drive at sunset, listening to Sheryl Crowe, and you'll see what I mean! No, I didn't enjoy living there

– it was the most unhappy period of my life, unquestionably. But I am fonder of it now.

Q. What are your thoughts about LA these days?

A. It's not associated with my experience of living there, weirdly – I take it on face value, which is the way it wants to be taken, but it is surreal. I do have two very close friends who live there, both of whom work in television, and so going there is associated with seeing them regularly, a perk of my career. I have such a deep mistrust of America, and its epicentre is LA. I think it was one of the French post-structuralists who said that the US is significant because of the reality it constructs, and that reality is constructed in Los Angeles, which is why it is at once so fascinating, and so scary. Los Angeles is a mono-cultural environment in which language has been disconnected from the meaning it has in the rest of the world, and where the image is constructed which 'real life' is based on.

Q. Do you ever take leisurely walks? Do you try and make time for that in the places you visit?

A. Very seldom. Bike rides in Amsterdam. Every Monday I walk home with Lucio from his school, a long meandering walk which he leads. Takes an hour. I very seldom have time to walk in the cities I visit: if I have time, I am usually desperate to sleep in order to minimise the impact of the travelling.

Q. How have you found your brief experiences walking in Johannesburg? Compared with other cities, what was your overriding feeling?

A. Walking in Johannesburg is so familiar, particularly in suburban Johannesburg. It reminds me of walking in the suburbs of my childhood in the Port Elizabeth of the Seventies – except for the walls. I am fascinated by the archaeology of Johannesburg walls, and have a habit of trying to date the additions to their height.

Q. How do shifts in rhythm (jetting between places, to wandering around when you arrive) 'speak' to you as a dancer?

A. They are utterly disruptive and jagged – there is no transition, no flow – so there's a constant sense of 'wrench'. Everything I do in response to this 'wrench' is the equivalent of what a dancer would call 'release'.

Q. Do you dance at all these days?

A. I dance on the inside.

Q. Do you feel that time is a finite resource, or do you experience it as malleable?

A. I think time is an argument which one is constantly losing.

Q. Do you move with ease between places, or do you ever have a sense of ambivalence about leaving?

A. I am paid to leave. I feel utterly without nationality, without affinity to location. I feel no ambivalence about leaving anywhere anymore. I long for home constantly, but home is linked only to the important people in my life – Marius, Lucio.

Q. Do you find it a strain that your friends are dotted all over the globe, or have you grown accustomed to it/feel the gains outweigh the losses?

A. A mixed blessing. On the one hand, I love the fact that I have friends in every port, that I have relationships with people of different cultures, professions, nationalities. But as the years have gone by, I find it harder and harder to keep abreast of these relationships.

Q. Is there a danger of places becoming the same to you?

A. Places are the same because they are places: I do have different responses to all of them. I have favourites (Stockholm) and unfavourites (London and Paris) and even one place I hope never to go back to – Hong Kong. I have places I am afraid of (Moscow) and places where I feel like I am dying (Port Elizabeth). I have places I hope to go to yet, like Tokyo. I have been to places I never dreamt I would see (Spitsbergen) and seen things I will never forget (cod in a river in northern Norway at dawn).

Q. You once said that you watch game shows in fast forward to get a sense of them, can you explain more what you mean by that/how it works?

A. Television programmes are extremely formulaic in their use of signs and tropes, signifiers for the audience. Like any temporal activity they have a rhythm. Most people pay conscious attention to the information and the action, and subconscious attention to the rhythm and the signs. I pay little attention to the former and all of it to the latter, because the former is usually in a language I don't understand, and it takes up too much time that way!

Q. You don't have a TV in your home, do you?

A. No, we don't have a television in our house. People usually show surprise on the basis of my career – that because I make it, I should watch it (a lot). This is as logical as to say that if I was a doctor, you would expect me to have a sick person in the living room. I am proof that I don't need to watch television in my leisure time in order to make a career out of it – although you might argue that I could have had a better career in television had I done so. I would dispute that – television makers who derive all their knowledge and inspiration from television are extremely problematic and derivative, in my view.

Q. It seems a strange irony that many South African men who left the country because they didn't support conscription, have actually done better for themselves in their respective fields than they'd have been able to do here. Any thoughts on that?

A. No. Never occurred to me.

Q. The pace in your writing is very slow, and spacious. Given your lifestyle, and the pace of your life, how does that shift happen?

A. I go into a trance when I write. At least part of me does, and it slows me down, it's not that I slow it down. The process slows me down. I suppose I should also add that the writing is really about structure, not about content, and the spaciousness comes from exploring the structure.

Q. What is the thing you like most about your lifestyle, that gives you the most joy?

A. As a boy growing up in Port Elizabeth, I dreamed of getting away. And I succeeded. Every time I get on a plane, I am travelling further and further away from that starting point.

Q. Anything you'd like to add?

A. Speed is the great lie we tell ourselves.

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Afterthoughts

Introduction

I was thinking about the word pedestrian. It is defined by my Oxford Concise dictionary as a "person walking rather than travelling in a vehicle". Also "dull" and "uninspired". From the French for "going on foot", and also "written in prose".

And prose, says Oxford, is "ordinary written or spoken language, without metrical structure", "another term for sequence", and to "talk tediously".

I must say I enjoy being a pedestrian, ambling from place to place, and thinking on my feet. It takes longer, but there's more texture along the way. When a friend mentioned that he felt the same way, I began to wonder what kind of person that is, who chooses to walk? And where (when) did the trend shift? As Milan Kundera lamented: "where have they gone, the amblers of yesteryear?" (Kundera, 1996, p. 4). I decided to ask.

The Interview

The interview process is a controversial one. Janet Malcolm, in *The Journalist and the Murder*, concludes melodramatically

> Like the young Aztec men and women selected for sacrifice, who lived in delightful ease and luxury until the appointed day when their hearts were to be carved from their chests, journalistic subjects know all too well what awaits them when the days of wine and roses – the days of the interviews – are over. And still they say yes when a journalist calls, and still they are astonished when they see the flash of the knife. (Malcolm, 1990, pp. 144-145)

Essayist Joan Didion is similarly cynical. "My only advantage as a reporter," she writes, "is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to

their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: writers are always selling somebody out" (Didion, 1968, p. xvi).

At the receiving end of the interview, an arguably paranoid JM Coetzee came to the conclusion, in 1990:

> If I had had any foresight, I would have had nothing to do with journalists from the start. Now it is too late: the word is out, passed from one journalist to another, at least in [South Africa] that I am an evasive, arrogant, generally unpleasant customer. I should have recognized from the first the philosophical cleavage between myself and the journalist. Two traditions, it seems to me, converge and reinforce each other in the journalistic interview. The first is legal: the interview is a politer version of courtroom interrogation or, better, the interrogation an investigating magistrate conducts prior to the public trial. The second is most immediately inherited from Rousseau, I suppose, but it draws on the ancient strain of religious enthusiasm as well as on the practice of psychotherapy: in the transports of unrehearsed speech, the subject utters truths unknown to his waking self. The journalist takes the place of the priest or *iatros*, drawing out this truth-speech. … The interviewer aligns himself with Richardson's Lovelace, the man who believes that truth lies inside the subject's body and that with his rapier-phallus he can search it out there. (Coetzee, 1992, p. 66)

Perhaps this is an occupational hazard in journalism, which leans towards 'exposé'. But my motives were less mercenary. My intention was to engage in conversation, which, as psychotherapist and author James Hillman points out, is itself much like walking.

> The word means turning around with, going back, like reversing, and it comes supposedly from walking back and forth with someone or something, turning and going over the same ground from the reverse direction. A conversation turns things around. And there is a verso to every conversation, a reverse, back side. …
>
> Whatever keeps us walking together with something and turns things around, upside down, converts what we already feel and think into something unexpected – this is the unconscious becoming conscious… .
>
> And to keep turning means that it's no use having fixed stands, definite positions. That stops conversation dead in its tracks. Our aim is not to take a stand on this or that issue, but to examine the stands themselves so they can be loosened and we can go on walking back and forth. (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, pp. 99-100)

Rebecca Solnit likens the process to musical improvisation. “I have these wonderful conversations with friends,” she says, “where we’ll stop and say, ‘Wait, how did we end up talking about this?’ I think everybody has them; it’s how we experience life. We’re always doing this sort of associational jazz riffing, in thoughts and conversation” (Sorkin, 2005, question 3).

While my pieces can’t be classed as conventional interviews, they can’t be considered straight biographical profiles either, as these require a “thesis”,[1] or position on the subject. Rather my intention was to be a mouthpiece for the subject’s own voice, and for this reason it was imperative that I tape record the interviews and transcribe them, rather than merely taking notes and providing an approximation of what was said.

I chose also to retain many of the pragmatic markers – the redundant phrases: “you know”s, “I mean”s and “kind of”s that pepper spoken (as opposed to written) language – as cutting them, I felt, would be like airbrushing away wrinkles from photographs.

The closest analogy I can find for what I was doing is of a portrait painter. The portrait would vary from one painter to another, but should be clearly recognisable as the subject. And most importantly, it should be clearly recognisable *to* the subject as well. While avoiding hagiography, it should concur with the subject’s experience.

The most important elements for me here, were respect, and trust. (Because of this I could probably never interview anyone whom I actively disliked.) It was imperative that the subject should trust me enough to be open and honest with me, in order to present a picture with light and shade and texture, and at the same time be confident that anything understood to be “off the record” was used to inform the story, but not included in it.

In many cases the people I interviewed are people with whom I have an historical relationship – if not friends, then acquaintances. It was more important to me (even with people whom I had only recently met) to preserve the relationship, rather than

[1] Lesley Cowling, “Biographical Journalism” seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 8 March 2004.

'get the story'. In the words of *Chicago Tribune* journalist, Mary Schmich: "Is it worth losing a friend just to tell that funny little story or make that flip remark?" (Schmich, 2003, point 13).

Author Alexandra Fuller sees the "question of betrayal" as the "key to the switch between fiction and non-fiction … . If you're dealing with real people, there's always the possibility of outing them against their will," she says. "Of betraying their confidence. How do you sleep at night knowing you've aired the deepest, darkest secrets of others?" The key, she suggests, is compassion. "Its okay to be honest, as long as you're compassionate. Honesty without compassion can be really ruthless" (Dodd, 2004, p. 8, ¶ 16-17).

For me, there was also the "do unto others …" injunction, that echoes in my mind.[2]

Mark Gevisser, Thabo Mbeki's biographer, advises against showing a piece to the subject before its publication. But for me there was no question about this. It was important to me that a., I got the facts straight, and b., the subject did not feel misrepresented in any way. This was also the big challenge for me: while recognising that facts and truth are not necessarily the same thing,[3] telling a version of the story which resonated with both mine and the subject's experience. This is probably why (though it was not premeditated) in a number of the stories the subject's experiences are told in parallel with my own.

The interviewer who acted as the strongest role model for me, ethically, was one of the founding fathers of the New Journalism, Gay Talese. Though probably best known for his profile of Frank Sinatra,[4] Talese is most interested in capturing the experiences of the person in the street: "people who don't make the news, but reflect the news", and finding out "what is it like for them to be them?" He describes himself

[2] This is less altruistic than it may sound. While I was interviewing author Damon Galgut, for example (not included in this research report), I was aware of the author watching me at the same time as I was interviewing him. Which of my eccentricities was he observing (particularly as a man who writes middle aged women very well), and filing for future use in his fiction, I wondered?

[3] William Faulkner put it more strongly, and stated that "facts and truth really don't have much to do with each other".

[4] Talese, Gay (1966, April), "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold", *Esquire*. Since Frank Sinatra had a cold, Talese never got the interview, but wrote the piece from what he observed at a distance.

as a “great prompter”, with a “sincere curiosity” (Gordon, 2003, audio). These are qualities to which I aspire.

Since I was writing a collection, the pieces have in some ways been cumulative. That is, I began to exclude things that had come up in earlier interviews when they seemed repetitive, or seemed like territory already covered. And in other instances, I deliberately included things that echoed earlier pieces, and seemed to create a motif.

The transcription process became easier with each interview, and I began editing as I transcribed. Technical issues of punctuation and flow became easier; like becoming familiar with a new instrument.

The Essay

The pieces that are about my own experiences, and didn’t involve interviews, could best be described as ‘tending towards’ the personal essay genre: but once again, these do not fit neatly into the mould.

One of the most important elements which distinguishes the personal essay from fiction stylistically, asserts non-fiction writer Vivian Gornick, is the voice of the narrator. While in fiction the reader cannot assume that the person telling the story is to be trusted, in the personal essay a reliable narrator is imperative. And this requires the development of a persona. “The ability to make us believe who is speaking,” she says, “is the trustworthy narrator achieved”. And “the trip being taken by a nonfiction persona deepens, and turns ever more inward” (Gornick, 2002, p. 14-17).

But this does not mean to imply that the process involves navel gazing. This voice needs to be “without sentiment or cynicism”; “not too close, not too far”, and is a truth-seeking persona, rather than a confessional voice. Of the best essayists, from William Hazlitt to George Orwell to Joan Didion, Gornick says: “In each case the writer was possessed of an insight which organised the writing, and in each case a persona had been created to serve the insight.” They “become interested then in their own existence only as a means of penetrating the situation in hand”. The writer pulls

the narrator "out of his or her own agitated and boring self to organise a piece of experience" (Gornick, 2002, pp. 23-25).

Caroline Langston says of a review by Katie Roiphe in *Slate* (Roiphe, 2003) that she "makes the assertion that Didion's work is nowhere near as "personal" as is claimed … . While Roiphe does not disapprove of Didion's tendency to describe her life in terms of the history and sociology that surrounds her, perhaps she does not understand the impulse" (Langston, 2003, ¶ 10). To a certain extent I think they have both missed the point, and that Didion is doing just the opposite: she is *using her life* to describe the history and sociology that surrounds her. In any event, this is what I have aimed to do.

This is a reminder that – despite the fact that it is non-fiction – the narrator is not the same person as the author. The wisdom of the narrator is a distillation from much of the neuroses of existence, in an attempt to make sense of the world in which we live.[5] While the reader may like to spend a day with the narrator, he or she would not necessarily enjoy a day with the author![6]

Orwell, "the involuntary truth speaker, the one who implicates himself not because he wants to but because he has no choice", Gornick says, "in unaesthetic actuality – was a man often at the mercy of his own insecurities. In life he could act and sound ugly" (Gornick, 2002, p. 17).

Of myself I would have to say that my sense of humour (and irony) often comes only in hindsight.

Virginia Woolf observed about nineteenth century essayist Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (De Quincey, 1862a):

[5] As Didion – arguably one of the most brilliant and neurotic essayists – put it famously in *The White Album* (p. 11) : "We tell ourselves stories in order to live".

[6] This applies, too, to the 'characters' created by the author through the distillation of interviewees experiences. Gornick tells a story about giving a reading from *Fierce Attachments*, a memoir about her relationship with her mother, when a woman in the audience asked: "If I come to New York, can I take a walk with your Mama?" Gornick replied that "she wouldn't want to take a walk with my mother, it was the woman in the book she wanted to walk with. They were not exactly the same" (Gornick, 2003, ¶ 1).

> All these scenes compose an autobiography of a kind, but of a kind which is so unusual that one is forced to ask what one has learnt about De Quincey in the end. Of facts, scarcely anything. … But nevertheless there grows upon us a curious sense of intimacy. … His confession is not that he has sinned but that he has dreamed. … Then it is not the actual sight or sound itself that matters, but the reverberations that it makes as it travels through our minds. … it is only by gathering up and putting together these echoes and fragments that we arrive at the true nature of our experience. (Woolf, 1926, pp. 38-40)

To return again very briefly to the interview, I would argue that – in the way that the essayist distils his or her own lived experience – it is the interviewer's job to distil the experience of her subject: extracting the interesting, rather than exposing the sensational.

The Truth

My reasons for choosing to write non-fiction rather than fiction echo those of Rebecca Solnit, whose book *Wanderlust* (Solnit, 2001) is also the most comprehensive history of walking yet written.[7] (Solnit describes it as "a moderately chronological survey of the cultural, political, social and spiritual functions of walking" [Sorkin, 2005, question 2].) "To find something in the world," she says, rather "than to invent it … conveys a different weight of information," which "poses different challenges". It requires you to explore "values, interpretation, personal vision, exclusion and selection". She likens it to "photography, or straight photography as we now talk about it, since there's so much digital manipulation in studio work".[8]

My preference for non-fiction stems also from an interest in serendipitous and synchronous events, and the way that fact often seems stranger than fiction. Curiously, encounters of this sort, when written as fiction, are often regarded by critics as 'unrealistic'. Paul Auster, whose body of work revolves around coincidences – "the rhythms and rhymes in the world", and "the music of chance" (the title of one

[7] In speaking about the breadth of her reading, reviewer Andrew O'Hehir observes that "She knows more about the history of labyrinths and about the Renaissance mnemonic device called the memory palace than any normal person should" (O'Hehir, 2000, April 27, ¶ 5).
[8] Solnit in conversation with Michael Silverblatt *KCRW Bookworm*, July 8 2004.

of his books) – observes wryly: "There's a widely held notion that novels shouldn't stretch the imagination too far" (Auster, 1982c. p. 288).

The notion of 'the truth', however, is a flawed one, since even truth (as distinct from 'the facts') is relative, and seen through the specific filters of the individual narrator. In the opening monologue of the play *Mnemonic*, by the Theatre de Complicite (1999), the narrator concludes: "Every memory that you remember is different, because it is remade in the very present that you remember. In other words, in order to remember you need the imagination" (qtd. on Andersen 2005, audio).

This, suggests media consultant Gary Carter, is the difference between digital and analogue: "it allows multiple copies without generational change – the clone is as the original. In analogue, of course, there was a 'deterioration' of image across time and copy, both in order to allow us to continue to revere the signature object, the individual, and as a way of constructing the poetic or the imagined, a way of preserving memory. The act of memorising is the act of making a copy, an imperfect one, a deteriorated one, an ordered one, a personal one" (Carter, 2003).

The essayist, according to Gornick, "must convince the reader they … are writing as honestly as possible to arrive at what they know" (Gornick, 2002, p. 14). But it can only ever be, as poet Chris Abani describes succinctly: "Truth as memory's best guess" (Abani, 2002, p. 13). Andre Brink is a little more cynical when he writes: "We fabricate yesterdays for ourselves which we can live with, which make the future possible …" (Brink, 2000, p. 287). In the words of Maya Angelou: "One must tell the truth. One doesn't tell every truth, but one chooses the truth one is going to tell, and one remains truthful while telling it."[9]

And the moment being recorded may be true, but things change quickly, and people move on – non-fiction fast becomes historical. A number of the people I've interviewed over the past two years have already moved on to different locations.

[9] This was actually said by Michael Silverblatt, quoting her back to herself in an interview. She didn't contradict him, but I wonder how close, in fact, this is to what she originally said, which illustrates the points above. Silverblatt refers to 'her words' as "a decision about presentation", as he examines her writing about Billie Holiday in *The Heart of a Woman*. Silverblatt in conversation with Angelou, *KCRW Bookworm*, July 31 2002.

The Essays

Preface: Who is Walking?

In examining the prefaces of a number of personal essay collections, I discovered two basic approaches. The first was an introduction to the idea of the book, or 'why I wrote this book'; and the second (less common) contained an introduction to each essay. The latter approach is closer to the model used in scholarly essay collections, and I opted for the former, allowing the essays following the preface to speak for themselves.

Conscientious Objections

This was the first interview that took place, and it became apparent to me from the outset that it was important to make the position of the narrator quite transparent, since David Bruce had been, as a friend put it, "an icon for our generation".[10] While, ironically, self-referential treatment of 'an icon' can sometimes be jarring, I aimed, by being completely transparent, to achieve the opposite effect. It was therefore important that I was clear about my own introduction to him as an icon, and how I later came to know him "as a walking human being" (Shapiro, 2003). This was also important to the later story on Los Angeles, and how I came to take the press clippings with me to the United States.

Perhaps it is because this piece was the first that was written, and so was not yet in dialogue with any of the other pieces, but it contains the fewest references to other external texts. It consists almost entirely of the transcript of the interview, and the narrator's parallel story. The 'dialogue' in this piece is almost exclusively between the interviewee and the narrator.

[10] Personal communication from Janis Shapiro, 17 November 2003. She continued that she had "never thought of David Bruce as anything else: like a walking human being".

An early reader felt concerned that the beginning of this piece promises something about memory that it doesn't follow through on, but in fact the theme of memory is explored through the pieces cumulatively.

Border Crossings

At first I thought this would be the longest essay as it seemed to me to be the central essay in the collection from which all the others depart; being as it is about the birth of the auto industry and the suburbs. I still see it as the central point, though I came to realise, sprawling as Los Angeles is, that it is only really possible to represent it in fragments. This is reflected in the literature that emerges from and about LA, which presents different pockets or angles, but can never give a view of the whole area (Didion, 1970; Meyerson, 2002; O'Connor, 2004; Fleischman, 2005); and films which work as a series of vignettes (*Short Cuts*; *Grand Canyon*; *Magnolia*; *Crash*), each segment of which offers a different perspective (Hoggard, 2005). Arguably, the closest that anyone has come to offering an aerial view of the city is Wim Wenders, in his film *The End of Violence*, which shows a (failed) attempt to keep watch of all of LA through surveillance cameras (Wenders, 1997). In the real, rather than fictional, LA this is achieved to some extent by traffic surveillance (Hartz, 1999). Of California more broadly, it has been said, it is "less a state than a collection of mythologies" (Langston, 2003, ¶ 1).

To return to my essay, it became apparent to me that LA reflected Johannesburg in the fragmentary nature of its stories – though some might refer to Joburg's stories as more "fractured" (de Waal in Miller, 2005, ¶ 2 of sidebar[11]) – and it seemed inevitable, particularly since my experience of LA was so long ago, that it would double back and become a comparative piece.

Joburg also resembles LA in other ways, not the least of which is its autocentricity, and it is possible that larger, autocentric cities, without a racially and economically integrated pedestrian culture, are the ones with the most fragmented, and often

[11] Here I am – in postmodern fashion – quoting the sidebar of a published version of one of the essays in this collection.

competing, narratives. Though, playing devil's advocate to myself, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (Calvino, 1974), with its numerous tales of the one city, Venice – arguably the most pedestrian-friendly city in the world – may suggest that fragmented states and competing narratives are an integral part of any city.

Approaching things from the opposite end of the LA-Joburg spectrum, it came as a surprise to me that LA resembles Joburg in its race and class divisions, and this is reflected directly in car ownership: the poor; people of colour; migrants; those for whom English is not their first language; the disabled; and arguably the eccentric, are also the only ones who use public transport in LA. It was probably inevitable, from the moment of recalling *God's Country*, the play about US white supremacists (Dietz, 1989), that race would become the central theme of this piece.[12]

It is no doubt significant that, while the essay is not one of the longer ones, this reflection on it (and the reference list) is. In both the essays on Paris and LA, since my experience of them was some time ago (apart from my memories), I relied more heavily on the theory/theories of these places, since they had become somewhat abstract and historical to me; but in the case of LA, I would suggest it is a city that is largely 'an idea' to most people, including to those who live there. As Nigerian author living in LA, Chris Abani, has put it: "LA is like a shapeshifter. It morphs into whatever your memories are. Whatever your nostalgia is, you will find it here" (University of Southern California, 2004, audio).

Speeding towards Paris

As discussed above, since it was quite a while before that I'd been to Paris, my reflections on it leaned towards the theoretical. But I don't think this was the only reason. If the writing was stylistically to reflect the place, Paris – with its tradition of

[12] It is worth noting that on May 17 2005 LA elected its first Latino mayor in 133 years. See Meyerson, Harold (2005, May 19-25). "New Mayor, New City", *LA Weekly*. http://www.laweekly.com/ink/05/26/powerlines-meyerson.php

philosopher-as-pop-star[13] – seemed to call for philosophical and theoretical reflection as well as anecdote.

As with anything, slowness can never be understood without examining its opposite: speed.[14] Since Paris is the home of Paul Virilio, the most prominent theorist of speed,[15] it was inevitable that his thoughts should be included (Virilio, 1986; 1995; 1999a; 1999b). In the writing of the essay I became aware of the way that memory works and, though I discovered the words from Theatre de Complicite's *Mnemonic* only later, they resonated with my discovery, and bear repeating: "Every memory that you remember is different, because it is remade in the very present that you remember. In other words, in order to remember you need the imagination." And essayist DJ Waldie adds that "Remembering is sabotage against the regime of speed" (Waldie, 2004, p. 17).

Though I did receive the *M/C* "call for papers" just before leaving on my trip (Bruns, 2000); and though my mind did race through the trip, and I arrived feeling exhausted, I had never heard of Virilio until the "Speed" issue of *M/C* was released the following month. In the writing of the piece, however, I felt that all my thoughts were converging at the time of writing, and so did not feel I was being untruthful. The story I was telling was in fact taking place at the time of writing.[16]

My thoughts (the inside of my own head) seems like the one place I feel at liberty to manipulate – as far as time is concerned at any rate, i.e. when a thought occurred to me – for the purposes of a narrative. Perhaps (it occurs to me now) at some level I

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[13] Eric Laurier has written extensively about this in his Ph.D thesis, *City of Glas/z* (Laurier, 1995) the title of which is both a play on the Glasgow he was writing about, and Roland Bathes' *S/Z*, since Barthes is central to Laurier's thesis.

Journalist Adam Gopnik irreverently defines philosopher as "the word the French use for any journalist with a lot of opinions" and is "one of the reasons I loved living in France" (*The Savvy Traveler*, 2000, December 22, audio).

[14] Though as Jay Griffiths, in *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, has observed: speed actually represents "the rate of happening; slow or fast", but has come to be associated with fastness (Griffiths, 2000, p. 29).

[15] Griffiths has described Virilio's writing on speed as one of the "glittering gems of fury" on the subject (Griffiths, 2000, p. viii).

[16] It occurred to me, too, as I was reading Denis Hirson's *I Remember King Kong (the Boxer)* (Hirson, 2004), that while the memories he's telling are all of the past, the constant refrain of "I remember …" is happening in the present, which makes it a story of the present: of a South Africa that he (we) remember today.

believe time, more than anything else, to be a construct, relative to our respective experiences and memories. Or perhaps my thoughts are just an area where I can't be contradicted (or found out!).

Though I read it subsequent to writing the Paris essay, Griffiths's *A Sideways Look at Time* (Griffiths, 2000) examines many of the complexities and competing cultural narratives about time. A small irony, which I think beautifully illustrates (quite literally) these differences – and this is before we begin to address differences between Western and traditional ways of being/seeing[17] – is evidenced in the juxtaposition of the respective covers of the UK and US editions of the book: the British (original) version has a picture on it of footsteps in the sand; the US printing displays a parking meter.[18]

I didn't think about it quite so consciously at the time, but it seems fitting to have juxtaposed the photography of Eugene Atget (White, 2001) and the birth of "motion pictures" (Solnit, 2003); the still photography which attempted to capture a moment in time in 1857, and motion pictures which made it possible to reinvent, and transcend space and time. It is doubly ironic that public cinema was in fact born in Paris, but caught on and took off in California, reflecting, perhaps, Paris's place as cultural centre, but California's as commercial. This is echoed in the way that I chose the two cities, Paris and Los Angeles, as the two ends of the spectrum (*flâneur*-friendly and autocentric) in which to situate the South African cities (Johannesburg and Cape Town).[19]

It is also not insignificant that a train is central to this story, since – much like "walking – or bipedality, as the evolutionists [Solnit] cites prefer to call it – is the defining characteristic of human development (and human exceptionalism)"

[17] The Aymara people, who live in the Andes, see (and literally gesture towards) the past in front of them, and the future behind (Spinney, 2005).
[18] Also interesting to me is the way that time has begun replacing space in the global imaginary, i.e. the question: "How far is it from Los Angeles to Paris?", may well be answered with: "About eleven hours."
[19] Joni Mitchell wrote about this tension between the old and new worlds, in the early seventies: "Sitting in a park in Paris, France / … But I wouldn't want to stay here / It's too old and cold and settled in its ways here / Oh, but California …" (Mitchell, 1971).

(Worpole, 2001, ¶ 3) – the invention of "the railroad" is a defining moment in speeding up our lives[20] (Solnit, 2003).

Central to the piece is the mixed blessing of technology, since it could be debated that somewhere, probably not long after the invention of the electric washing machine (1910), the idea of the 'labour saving device' became something of an illusion, given the disproportionate amount of time it takes to manage one's technology. As an example, think of how long it takes to deal with 'spam' in one's e-mail. Contradictorily, in a time before instantaneity,[21] it was in the delays between 'send' and 'receive' (in whatever form that took) that people had time to get things done. The central theme of this piece is the paradox of progress.

It seemed fitting, if somewhat ironic, that this is the first piece in which Herman Charles Bosman – so central to the collection – is introduced, and in which he is established as a well-travelled man of the world, in addition to, as he is often called, "South Africa's best-loved writer" (de Waal, 2005, ¶ 1). It should be also be noted that, while Bosman (or his alter ego, the "national hoodwinker",[22] Oom Schalk Lourens) might have been the best of talkers, he is remembered as more of a *flâneur* than a great walker. "Justice Albie Sachs, tells the story [handed down to him by his uncle, Bernard] that Bosman just set off on one his promenades, telling everyone he was going to walk all the way to Cairo. He reached as far as Pretoria, detouring past his old prison abode, but found the Union Buildings an obstacle in his path, barring his way. So he decided to turn back" (Gray, 2005, p. 148).

Once again, the extent to which this relatively short essay drew on theoretical material is reflected in the comparative length of this analysis.

[20] Though as Christopher Lydon remarks, "Thoreau famously observed the train being built between Boston and Pittsburgh, and he expressed the strong opinion that the fastest most efficient way to get anywhere, was walking" (Lydon, 2000, audio).
[21] In her article, "Waiting for Instantaneity", Maya Drozdz argues that instantaneity is just an illusion; that "Despite the hype surrounding the instantaneity of virtual travel, narrative in cyberspace is inherently subordinate to connection speed and loadtime" (Drozdz, 2000, ¶ 3).
[22] Stephen Gray in conversation with Jenny Crwys-Williams, *Radio 702: Book Show*, June 8 2005.

Slow Walk to Freedom

This was the first piece that was written, as a response to my second mugging, and the one that gave me the idea of producing a collection, which included others' voices. It was initially written as a 1200 word magazine piece,[23] and later developed to include the earlier mugging. There was some debate about the 'polemical' nature of the conversation with the old lady, and whether to include it, but this was how it happened, and also brought in the theme of the "oil wars", touched on in the introduction, which I felt was integral to the broader discussion in the collection about "autopia" and industrial complexes (auto, military etc.).

When I read Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Mugging", though I only read it long after the essay was written, I was struck by the similarities in the way that he itemises the things that were stolen, and reveals his identity in the process.

The muggings highlight the presence of competing social narratives.

Finding the Balance

In this piece, it was (coincidentally) difficult initially – more so than with the others – to find the balance between narrators. My tendency was to let Sue speak entirely for herself, engaging storyteller that she is, and to 'hold court', as I imagine she might do on her stoep in the platteland. But this, I was told (and recognise in hindsight), left me "silenced or elided", and undermined the "participative textuality" (rather than conventional journalism/interview) – begun in "Conscientious Objections" – that I aimed to continue .[24]

I should say a few words here about the convention of naming. Throughout the collection I have used first names (as distinct from the journalistic convention of referring to surname), but have almost always included the surname of the person

[23] The piece was bought by *Fair Lady*, but never published, as it was thought eventually that it "didn't fit in with anything else" (Conversation with features editor, Troye Lund).
[24] Notes from Michael Titlestad on the first draft of the piece.

being interviewed; in all except this piece: Sue is only ever Sue. There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, I have included surnames when the people I am writing about are public figures, and the reader might like to refer to his or her own experience of the subject, outside of the walking context (having perhaps read something or seen a performance by the interviewee). In the case of Sue, however, this does not apply. I also wanted to tell the story here of an ordinary citizen, and how she participates in the community around her.

In the Footsteps of Bosman and Dickens, via Hillbrow

Here, while I was quite present as a narrator, it felt inappropriate to introduce my own experiences into the narrative. It was suggested that perhaps this was due to Phaswane's charismatic presence, and while this may be true to some extent, I think it relates more to a sense of respect, and acknowledgement of my unfamiliarity with his experience. Here I wished to highlight (albeit not directly) the *lack* of shared experience, and to be quite clear that I was telling the story of another, whose life had been very far away from mine, even if in close physical proximity at certain points in time. This emphasises the overt and covert effects of the divisions created by apartheid.

The interweaving of Phaswane's voice with others, happens in the unstated dialogue with the other pieces. For example, the suburban Highlands North that Phaswane found so boring on his first visit to Johannesburg, was the location of my second mugging. My first mugging took place in 'our Hillbrow', when it was no longer 'my Hillbrow', evoking a sense of nostalgia in me for another time. But this was a time when Phaswane would not have felt (or been) welcome, so the stretch of common ground on which we met – echoing the "Border Crossings" piece – was in the realm of language, and a shared love of literature, and highlights the conversation of literature across time. *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865) was my favourite book as a child, and it was Phaswane who introduced me to Bosman's work.

Once again, this echoes Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (Calvino, 1974); the vastly differing experiences, of the same city.

In an abridged, published version of this piece,[25] shortly after Phaswane's death, the editorial decision was to translate it into the past tense. I decided here to keep it in the present tense, to preserve the moment of intersection.

There was another small (but significant, I think) editorial decision to be made. After his quoting from "Makapan's Caves", Phaswane lent me his *A Bosman Treasury* to read the story, and it was from this book that I originally quoted the opening passage. Bosman had originally spelt the word Kafir, in this story, as in this anthology, with one 'f'. I decided later, however, to refer to the collection *Mafeking Road and Other Stories*, edited by Craig MacKenzie – part of the centenary edition of Bosman's works, as this book might be easier for the reader to find; and in this version MacKenzie had changed the spelling to Kaffir, with two 'ff's'. Stephen Gray clarified for me that Bosman had shifted between the two spellings in his writing, and Gray and Mackenzie, when editing the centenary edition, had standardised the spelling throughout to double 'f'.[26]

A Cappella

At first this piece was not intended to be included in this research report. It was written as part of the final book, but I had reached my word-count for this limited collection. When I thought about it, though, it seemed important to include a story about Cape Town, as the experiences of walking in that city differ so much from walking in Joburg, and it is less harshly divided along class lines. This would provide a more balanced view of walking in South African cities, as contrasted with Paris at one end, and Los Angeles at the other, of the international spectrum.

Since Graham raised his experience of Sandton, it seemed natural to continue exploring his comparison to Cape Town, and reflect on theorist Paul Gilroy's observations about the area.

[25] Miller, Andie (2005, January 21). "A storyteller's story", *Mail & Guardian*.
[26] Mackenzie coincidentally illustrated this editorial decision, in his presentation: "Making a Case for Close Textual Editing in South African Literature", at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) colloquium: *Present and Future Directions in South African Studies*, 26 May 2005.

Fast Forward

This piece was intended as something of a coda, deliberately different stylistically from the others, aiming to reflect, firstly, the difference between an interview conducted virtually via e-mail, and those transcribed from real conversations; and secondly, the difference in rhythm of someone whose lifestyle is faster, and so has less time at his disposal.

In many ways Gary represents the "voyeur-gods", that Michel de Certeau speaks of in "Walking in the City", in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93), who theorise, and have the money and power to 'call the shots', but rarely have the time to just 'hang out', and walk the diverse streets they find themselves in.

At first I thought his would be a more dissenting voice than it turned out to be, so his final conclusion, reiterating my point, was a serendipitous occurrence. I also thought it provided a nice contrast having someone else's written words, in contrast to the transcriptions of interviewees words which were, in the final analysis, my constructions. My contribution to shaping this last piece was only in the formulation of the questions, but – apart from one or two typos – I neither edited, moved, nor changed anything in the piece.

The References

A few words of acknowledgement are due here, to Rebecca Solnit, whose referencing system (Solnit, 2001) I have borrowed. At first, as a reader, I found it pedantic, but in lieu of footnotes, it proved to be the best referencing system I have found; quite unambiguous, and leaving no room for confusion.

The Omissions

I anticipate that the final book will be comprised of about 20-30 pieces, making up around 80 000 words, so I will mention here a few of the stories that I have in mind,

but have not yet been written. In most cases I have people ready to be interviewed; a few of the stories remain ideas, subject to the availability of interviewees.

The conversations between these, and the completed pieces, the echoed themes and refrains, should be apparent.

- The writer-walker (Damon Galgut: interview complete, but story not yet written) in the tradition of the romantics.

- A visually impaired woman who sees "with my ears".

- An academic who walks.

- A muslim woman who walks long distances in Cape Town, because it's safer than catching taxis from the township where she lives; including an examination of 'walking in weather'.

- Walking as an elderly person.

- 'Walking the dog' – stories of walks legitimised by having a dog at heel (who's walking whom?); and a blind man's relationship with his dog (guide dogs vs. guard dogs).

- A woman who walks because she cannot drive as a result of epilepsy.

- A man in a wheelchair who was a crime victim, shot in the spine.

- Someone who walks with a prosthetic limb, after amputation.

- 'Foreigners' walking – Johannesburg residents from other countries walking this city vs. their more pedestrian-friendly native cities.

- A refugee who has travelled to South Africa, over the borders, on foot.

- A mother whose child has inherited her (sometimes risky) pedestrian habits.

- Friday Night in Glenhazel – Jewish families who walk on the Sabbath in the north-eastern suburbs of Johannesburg.

- A woman who, at a "modal interchange" (usually a site of crime stories) – after leaving a taxi, and waiting for a bus – met her husband.

- Taxi Driver's day off – a Johannesburg taxi driver who loves walking in rural KwaZulu-Natal, where he is from.

- Patricia Glyn, who walked a "spayathon" from KwaZulu-Natal to Victoria Falls, in the footsteps of her ancestors, setting out on March 20 2005 and arriving on July 22, to raise R300 000 to "sterilise one dog or cat for every kilometre walked".

- An account of walking home after the bomb blasts in London on July 7 2005.

- Someone who hates walking, and does everything she can to avoid it.

- An account of a baby learning to walk, through the eyes of his mother.

The Theory

Much of the theory that informed the collection was directly and transparently examined in the individual pieces, so I will touch on it again only briefly here. Where the theorists were only indirectly referred to, I will elaborate a little more.

I was surprised to find, apart from just one audio interview, no cross-referencing or comparison in the existing literature between Solnit's *Wanderlust* (Solnit, 2001) and *Motion Studies* (Solnit, 2003), and Jay Griffiths's *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*

(Griffiths, 2000), since there are many overlaps in their bibliographies, and though Solnit is a little more conventionally scholarly, they are both women concerned with conservation, who use the cycles and rhythms of the natural world to illustrate their theses. The absence of a comparison may be because Solnit is American, and Griffiths is British.

Marx's *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973), and David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Harvey, 1990), illustrate the fundamental contradictions in the demand for speed in the world of commerce. Harvey demonstrates with his "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1990, pp. 199-323) how the world has become very small; Virilio echoes how we can be anywhere fast, but nowhere for long (Virilio, 1995); and Mark Dery predicts, in *Escape Velocity*[27] (Dery, 1997), that the ultimate trade for speed will be our bodies.[28] The effects of this on mental health are examined in James Gleick's *Faster*. "One measure of twentieth-century time is the supersonic three and three-quarter hours it takes the Concorde to fly from New York to Paris,"[29] he writes. "Other measures come with the waits on the expressways and the runways. *Gridlocked* and *tarmacked* are metonyms of our era" (Gleick, 2000, ¶ 17). And to these I would add jet lag. Paul Virilio tells the story, in his interview "The Third

[27] Escape velocity is the speed at which an object needs to be travelling in order to break free of a planet or moon's gravity well to enter orbit.

[28] On the subject of neglecting one's body, Carl Honoré has observed that "the fastest nations are also often the fattest" (Honoré, 2004, p. 7). Research in 2004 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in Altanta, found that "obesity is quickly catching up with tobacco-related illnesses as the [US's] most dangerous public health scourge". Apart from the fast food diet, the study concluded, "there's another factor often overlooked in the obesity epidemic that deserves more attention. The neighborhoods where many Americans live, especially those here in metro Atlanta, are too often designed to promote vehicular travel, but discourage walking and other forms of physical activity" (ajc.com, 2004). A South African friend, living in Atlanta, wrote to me: "In the road in which I live, there is a pavement on only one side of the road. Technically I should cross the road to where the sidewalk is, especially when I'm laden with grocery shopping and library books, late at night, etc, in the pouring rain ... But the problem with the roads here is that they are virtually impossible to cross. Traffic is permanent. The pedestrian light goes green once every half an hour, for a sum total of about 45 seconds. That's where there are pedestrian lights. So I am practising my Death Valley Dash, in which I race down the little suburban highway outside my house, trying to get to my front door before the SUV behind me. The cars here are LARGE …" (Jonker, 2006).

[29] Gleick's book was written before 24 October 2003, when the Concorde had its last flight. But given that it used two tonnes of fuel just taxiing down the runway, and served an elite – like "the former Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, [who] enthusiastically reported, flying by Concorde allowed one to drop the kids off at a posh London school in the morning, and be addressing a Weight Watchers meeting in New York before lunch" (Topham, 2003, ¶ 6) – we shouldn't shed too many tears, Gwyn Topham argued in the *Guardian*: "Speed erodes difference: to abolish distance is not to travel at all. … At least on a 767, we'll all have four or five hours extra in which to read the guidebook and remember why going abroad was supposed to be exciting in the first place" (Topham, 2003, ¶ 10-12).

Window" (Virilio, 1988), of Sarah Krasnoff,[30] a 74-year-old woman who flew back and forth between New York City and Amsterdam with her seven or eight-year-old grandson almost daily for a period of six months, in order to remove him from a custody battle. They flew 167 times, never venturing further than the airport building, and on 1 September 1971 she died, the medical profession said, of jet lag (Virilio 1988; Iyer, 2004). According to Virilio this "marvelous heroine" lived in "deferred time" (Virilio, 1988, p. 196).

While is seemed to me that the predisposition of many walkers not to own or watch much television was probably as a result of the "spectacle" of the street providing enough entertainment (Benjamin, 1938, p. 59; Baudelaire, 1869a, p. 99), it is worth noting Virilio's observation that "I always connect these two media: the automobile and the audiovisual. What goes on in the windshield is cinema in the strict sense. It seems very important to me to join them rather than separate them, because speed is what interests me"[31] (Virilio, 1988, p. 188). Perhaps then, what Virilio is pointing to is a predisposition in those who enjoy the speed of driving, for the faster, remote-controlled imagery and entertainment that TV, VCR and DVD provide, which is mediated through a glass screen – his "Third Window"; following the first, the opening to a dwelling ("perhaps to Plato's fabled cave", suggests Scott McQuire [McQuire, 1995, ¶ 19]), and the second, the traditional window, which facilitates the movement of light and air.

Virilio describes speed as "nothing other than a vision of the world" (Virilio, 1988, p. 194). As the child in Flannery O'Connor's story, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, puts it: "Let's go through Georgia fast so we won't have to look at it much" (O'Connor, 1968, p. 11). It is not a long leap to draw a parallel between a "windshield" and the protection from the real world that a TV screen provides.

Michel de Certeau examines the divisions between the "voyeur-gods" who have the power to shape the paths that are walked, but rarely have the time to walk them, and

[30] Her name is spelt Krachnov in the interview, but this appears to be incorrect. I have used what seems to be the common spelling, confirmed by the Television News Archive at Vanderbilt University, at http://openweb.tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/1971-9/1971-09-01-CBS-18.html.

[31] Someone has remarked on the irony of the speed at which Virilio produces his books – his output is prolific. The same observation could be made about Rebecca Solnit.

the pedestrians "whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of the urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). Despite Benjamin Franklin's oft-quoted quip in 1748 that "time is money", it remains a conundrum finding the balance between having enough money and power to buy some self-determination, and the time to enjoy it.

Time alone is not useful, though, and in attempting to strike a balance between time and money, speed has become the commodity sought after. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman points out that those without any access to speed are "marooned in the opposite world … crushed under the burden of abundant, redundant and useless time they have nothing to fill with" (Bauman, 1998, p. 88). Given time constraints, speed determines how far we can travel. With enough money, like Mark Shuttleworth, we can travel to outer space, but time determines how long we can stay.

Walter Benjamin beautifully describes the leisurely life afforded the *flâneur* with an independent income in his book on Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), whom he describes as "a lyric poet in the era of high capitalism". Baudelaire strolled through the arcades in Paris, the nineteenth century equivalent of the suburban mall, "lighted from above [and] lined with the most elegant shops … . Such an arcade," Benjamin wrote, "is a city, even a world, in miniature" (Benjamin, 1938, p. 37). A notable difference between these Arcades and Sandton City, is that today there are many more women of leisure strolling through.[32]

Virginia Woolf recalls her sister, Stella, in *Moments of Being*: "She was nineteen when I was six or seven; and as a girl could not then go about London alone, I used as a small child to be sent with her, as chaperone" (Woolf, 1976, p. 97). This would have been around 1887/88, during Queen Victoria's reign. When a woman went out walking in the company of a man at this time, it was often assumed to be a courtship ritual. As Woolf wrote, in *To the Lighthouse*, set at around the same time: "Ah, but was that not Lily Briscoe strolling along with William Bankes? … Yes, indeed it was. Did that not mean they would marry? Yes, it must!" (Woolf, 1927, p. 113).

[32] Rebecca Solnit speaks about the way that, when it was unacceptable for women to appear in public alone, they would legitimise their presence by shopping – "proving they were not for purchase by purchasing" (Solnit, 2001, p. 237).

Four years later William James[33] wrote "The Stream of Consciousness" (James, 1892, pp. 151-175) and by 1925, when "safety and propriety were no longer considerations" (Solnit, 2001, p. 187), Woolf was free to examine this inner world, while walking the city streets in the person of *Mrs Dalloway*, in her novel of that name (Woolf, 1925). And shortly after that, "one day walking round Tavistock Square[34] I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary rush" (Woolf, 1976, p. 81).

James Joyce (who shared the same dates with Woolf: 1882 – 1941) had written *Ulysses* – thought by some to be "the greatest novel of the twentieth century" (Solnit, 2001, p. 128) – in 1922, about a salesman's day-long walk through the streets of Dublin. Joyce and Woolf were the first to experiment with stream of consciousness writing, which so naturally blended with writing about travel, and was popularised in 1957 – a more autocentric time – by Jack Kerouac, in *On the Road* (Kerouac, 1957).

In 1930 Woolf wrote one of the finest essays on walking, *Street Haunting*.[35] "No one perhaps has ever felt passionately towards a lead pencil," she begins. "But there are circumstances in which it can become supremely desirable to possess one; moments when we are set upon having an object, an excuse for walking half across London between tea and dinner. … So when the desire comes upon us to go street rambling the pencil does for a pretext, and getting up we say: 'Really I must buy a pencil,' as if under cover of this excuse we could indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter – rambling the streets of London" (Woolf, 1930a, p. 19).

Woolf was a passionate walker. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, author of the essay "In Praise of Walking" (Stephen, 1901), had been a great alpinist, but as Woolf wrote to Vita Sackville-West in 1924, "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" (Woolf, 1975-1980, p. 126). Women were generally excluded

[33] His younger brother, Henry James, was a frequent visitor at Woolf's family home.
[34] Tavistock Square was the Woolf's London home from 1924-1939.
[35] This was one of the 70 Pocket Penguins published to celebrate Penguin's 70th birthday in 2005.

from the boys walking clubs anyway (which possibly influenced Woolf's preference for the city streets).[36] As Rebecca Solnit points out, if a group of women called their walking club the "Sunday Tramps", as did Stephen and his friends, it would have had an altogether different connotation (Solnit, 2001, p. 234). American journalist, Christopher Morley, wrote in his essay, "The Art of Walking": "Mr. Holliday it is who has bravely stated why so few of the fair sex are able to participate in walking tours" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 14). He was referring here to Robert Cortes Holliday who, in the same year, had declared in his *Walking-Stick Papers* (I think it is worth quoting at length):

> Mention should be made in passing that some have been found so ignorant of the nature of journeys as to suppose that they might be taken in company with members, or a member, of the other sex. Now, one who writes of journeys would cheerfully be burned at the stake before he would knowingly underestimate women. But it must be confessed that it is another season in the life of man that they fill.
>
> They are too personal for the high enjoyment of going a journey. They must be forever thinking about you or about themselves; with them everything in the world is somehow tangled up in these matters; and when you are with them (you cannot help it, or if you could they would not allow it), you must be forever thinking about them or yourself. Nothing on either side can be seen detached. They cannot rise to that philosophic plane of mind which is the very marrow of going a journey. One reason for this is that they can never escape from the idea of society. You are in their society, they are in yours; and the multitudinous personal ties which connect you all to that great order called society that you have for a period got away from physically are present. Like the business man who goes on a vacation from business and takes his business habits along with him, so on a journey they would bring society along, and all sort of etiquette.
>
> He that goes a journey shakes off the trammels of the world; he has fled all impediments and inconveniences; he belongs, for the moment, to no time or

[36] All her life Woolf felt caught between the world of the women and the men. The line was drawn for her by the staircase in their home. "At 7.30 we went upstairs to dress," she wrote of herself and her sister Vanessa, in *Moments of Being*. "However cold or foggy it might be, we slipped off our day clothes and stood shivering in front of washing basins. Neck and arms had to be scrubbed, for we had to come into the drawing room at 8 o'clock in evening dress: arms and neck bare. Dress and hair-doing became far more important than pictures and Greek. … The division in our life was curious. Downstairs there was pure convention: upstairs pure intellect. … No one cared less for convention [than father]. No one respected intellect more. Thus I would go from the drawing room … to father's study to fetch a [new book]. There I would find him, swinging in his rocking chair, pipe in mouth. Slowly he would realise my presence. Rising, he would go to the shelves, put the book back and ask me very kindly what I had made of it? Perhaps I was reading Johnson. For some time we would talk and then, feeling soothed, stimulated, full of love for this unworldly, very distinguished, lonely man, I would go down to the drawing room again …" (Woolf, 1976, pp. 130-136).

> place. He is neither rich nor poor, but in that which he thinks and sees. There is not such another Arcadia for this on earth as in going a journey. He that goes a journey escapes, for a breath of air, from all conventions; without which, though, of course, society would go to pot; and which are the very natural instinct of women. (Holliday, 1917, chap. II, ¶ 3-5)[37]

Stephen echoed the pleasure of "independence and detachment" to be "enjoyed during a walking tour" (Stephen, 1901, qtd. on *WebWalkers*[38]).[39] For Woolf, however, there were few greater joys than walking in the city. And as Solnit suggests, the ability to walk alone in the city streets was one of the things that defined her as a modern woman[40] (Solnit, 2001, p. 187-188). But while a *flâneuse* is no longer automatically considered a woman of ill-repute, she is, for the most part, no longer safe: particularly after dark.[41] Janet Wolff has examined the dominance of the "male gaze", in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Wolff, 1990).

Sociologist Maureen Stone was born and grew up in Barbados. In her book *Black Woman Walking*, she examines the world of difference between the modern woman

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[37] Ten years later, Woolf satirised this in her novel *To the Lighthouse*, when even the tomboyish Minta couldn't win with her walking companion: "But it would not do altogether, this shouting … Andrew felt, picking his way down the cliff, this clapping him on the back, and calling him "old fellow" and all that; it would not altogether do. It was the worst of taking women on walks" (Woolf, 1927, p. 118).

[38] I was unable to find this essay in its entirety.

[39] Woolf said of him: "Give him a thought to analyse, the thought of Mill, Bentham, Hobbes; and his is … acute, clear, concise: an admirable model of the Cambridge analytical spirit. But give him life, a character, and he is so crude, so elementary, so conventional …" (Woolf, 1976, p. 126). She wrote of his temper tantrums, in front of her and her sister, but never her brothers, that "His dependence upon women perhaps explains that" (Woolf, 1976, p. 125). Interestingly enough, Ian Brodrick has written, in his article "Psychology and the Climber", that the "Puer Aeternus … the eternal boy … having a great dependence on the mother or her substitute … love[s] to climb … . A flight can also occur into the world of thought, for the world of emotion is one that the[y] … aren't so comfortable with" (Brodrick, 1999, ¶ 5-6).

[40] If, as Baudelaire suggests, "transience" is the distinguishing feature of modernity (Baudelaire, 1863), then perhaps walking and motion can be considered amongst its defining metaphors.

[41] Margaret Atwood suggests that "A case could be made for a genre called the Male Labyrinth Novel, which would trace its ancestry through De Quincey and Dostoyevsky and Conrad, and would include Kafka, Borges, García Márquez, DeLillo and Auster, with the Hammett-and-Chandler noir thriller thrown in for good measure. It's mostly men who write such novels and feature as their rootless heroes, and there's probably a simple reason for this: send a woman out alone on a rambling nocturnal quest and she's likely to end up a lot deader a lot sooner than a man would" (Atwood, 2004, ¶ 10). In her 1992 novel, *The Blindfold*, Siri Hustvedt's protagonist, Iris ("Siri in the mirror", as she puts it) walks the New York City streets at night, frequenting bars: but she does so wearing a man's suit. Hustvedt's husband, Paul Auster, asked if the protagonist in his novel *Leviathan* (published in the same year), Peter Aaron (sharing Auster's initials) could marry Iris, and according to Hustvedt she "thought that was a lovely thing, because Iris was left hanging at the end of the first novel. And I thought it was very nice that she ended up married to Peter Aaron, and doing rather well". *Leviathan* leaves "Iris and the children … off swimming in the pond" (Auster, 1992, p. 274).

who chooses to walk, and the rural woman who walks, sometimes for an entire day, because she has no other way of getting where she needs to go:

> At about the same time that Ffyona Campbell is doing her great walk across Africa, in Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, two black women are walking along a road in Hwange National Park, heading for the tourist lodge forty-three kilometres from the main road, where the bus dropped them at 9.30 in the morning. It is 2.30, and they have been walking ever since. They are returning from a visit to their village, to join their husbands who work at the lodge. They are each carrying two suitcases, and an assortment of other bags and packages, as well as the inevitable baby on each back. Unless they get a lift from a car or lorry it will be 5.30 or 6 p.m. before they reach their destination. They are not "great walkers" in the style of Ms Campbell; they are just two African women going about their normal business, in the course of which they may walk forty-three kilometres or more. They think nothing of it. It's all in a day's work. (Stone, 2002, p. 3)

It should be mentioned that during a visit to South Africa, out walking in Durban, Stone was mugged.[42]

In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino (Calvino, 1974) shows how one city can be seen and experienced differently by different people. He illustrates how a city, as one person experiences it, can be completely invisible to another.[43]

In the language of music, I conceived of the collection as polyphonic variations on a theme; stylistically different in ways, but always returning to, or hinting at, the original melody. Within each piece I aimed to produce a "polyvocality"[44] between the points of view of the interviewee, the interviewer, and the people, writers and theorists quoted. I wanted to make it quite transparent that the interviewer or narrator is present in the construction of the pieces, but also to allow interviewees to speak for themselves: what Rebecca Solnit has described, in a different context, as an "accretion of independent gestures by many creatures" (Solnit, 2001, p. 206).

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[42] Interview with Leigh-Ann Mol on "The World Today", *SABC3*, October 5 2004.
[43] This first became clear to me when I saw Oliver Schmitz's film, *Mapantsula*, which showed parts of Johannesburg which I was familiar with, but worlds that were entirely invisible to me.
[44] I am aware that this term was first coined by Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), and popularised in Western academic circles by Julia Kristeva, but I must admit that my understanding of the term was drawn from *Semiotics for Beginners* by Daniel Chandler.

As well as the intertextuality of the writing – in dialogue with everything that has come before (Kristeva, 1986)[45] – I aimed for a kind of 'intratextuality', or conversation between the pieces themselves.

I agree with Roland Barthes that a text can be described as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146), but I don't agree that the author is dead. I see the role and presence of the author in the unique construction of the existing materials, and in Seamus Heaney's terms, the unique "voice" (Heaney, 1974). Paul Auster agrees with Heaney that a voice (as with a walk) is "like your thumbprint. You write in the way you do because that's the natural rhythm of your thoughts. The natural rhythm of your whole being" (Bernstein, 1995, audio). Heaney describes this idiolect, or distinct use of words and phrases in combination, as "the absolute register to which your proper music has to be tuned" (Heaney, 1974, p. 44). Arthur Conan Doyle – the creator of one of the greatest detectives of all time, Sherlock Holmes – found a middle ground. "No man invents a style," he wrote, in *Through the Magic Door*. "It always derives back from some influence, or, as is more usual, it is a compromise between several influences. I cannot trace Poe's. And yet if Hazlitt and De Quincey had set forth to tell weird stories they might have developed something of the kind"[46] (Conan Doyle, 1919, chap. 6, ¶ 18).

I think Donald Barthelme was right in his observation that "collage is the art form of the twentieth century".[47] To quote Rebecca Solnit once again, it is in the "exclusion and selection" (Silverblatt, 2004a, audio) where the "Author-God's" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146) hand is at work. To say that the author is dead, I would suggest, is as spurious as to propose that the editor of the evening news is not manipulating the viewer's perspective of the world.[48]

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[45] Once again, I drew not on Kristeva's original for my understanding of intertextuality, but on *Semiotics for Beginners*.
[46] While Poe's style has often been described as Gothic, he said, in the Preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, that his "terror is not of Germany, but of the soul" (Poe, 1840b, ¶ 1).
[47] This is quoted by Paul, the "Sidney Poitier's son" imposter, in John Guare's play *Six Degrees of Separation* (Guare, 1990, p. 57), so Barthelme may or may not have said it like that, which again illustrates the point.
[48] See Miller 2002 for Gary Carter's illustration of this point.

Where I think Barthes is particularly in error is in the polarisation of his argument, as though the author and the reader are mutually exclusive. To my mind, the interpretation of any text is a co-creation between how the author presents a story, and how it is then received by the individual reader. As Heaney puts it, "Words can allow you that two-faced approach … . They stand smiling at the audience's way of reading them and winking back at the poet's way of using them" (Heaney, 1974, p. 54). But he is equally acknowledging of the way that every text draws on "the great backwash of achievement" (Silverblatt, 2004b, audio).

Barthes also seems to disregard the 'carpenter' as an emotional (as well as intellectual) being; seeming to view the craftsperson as a machine.[49] While I recognise the importance of craft, I am of the opinion, like author Jonathan Lethem, that "Emotion inheres in the architecture of sentences" (Silverblatt, 2003, audio). Heaney elaborates: "Finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them …" (Heaney, 1974, p. 43). Robert Frost put it another way: "A poem … begins as a lump in the throat … a homesickness, a lovesickness. … It finds the thought and the thought finds the words" (Frost, 1964 p. 199). Perhaps this is the difference between theory and poetry.

Heaney draws a distinction between craft and technique, though. When you have "broken the skin on the pool of yourself,' he says, "Technique, as I would define it, involves not only a poet's way with words, his management of metre, rhythm and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality." Like a water diviner, he says, "It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art. Technique entails the watermarking of your essential patterns of perception, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines; it is that whole creative effort of the mind's and body's resources to bring the

[49] Camille Paglia is of the opinion that "an openness toward emotion is totally missing from poststructuralists and postmodernists, who are addicted to a kind of callow whimsical irony. … The problem with criticism," she says, "in this era of the theorists (the last thirty years) is that it talks down condescendingly to literature. It says that somehow the critic has a higher knowledge than the artist" (Silverblatt, 2005a audio).

meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form. Technique is what turns, in Yeats' phrase, 'the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast' into 'an idea, something intended, complete'" (Heaney, 1974, p. 47).

"When I called my second book *Door into the Dark*" (Heaney, 1969), he continues, "I intended to gesture towards this idea of poetry as a point of entry into the buried life of the feelings or as a point of exit for it. Words themselves are doors …" (Heaney, 1974, p. 52). The title of William Styron's book, *Darkness Visible*[50] (Styron, 1990), how Styron defines depression, echoes this idea, and would explain why many poets are depressives, or rather, why many people suffering from depression turn to poetry as a means of expression.

I am aware that while I have looked extensively at the *flâneur*, I have not examined the dérive ("drift") of Guy Debord (Debord, 1982) and the Situationists (Knabb, 1982) at all. This was quite conscious as – apart from having to make choices about what to explore in the "pathways of possibility" – they and their style of walking, did not 'speak to me', or what I was attempting to document.

I have also not examined Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and their tradition of pastoral walking, since my focus was predominantly on urban walking,[51] but I am aware of their place in the canon on walking.[52]

The Poets

Two weeks before the end of the eighteenth century, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and his sister Dorothy (1771-1855) walked for four days across the Pennine

[50] This phrase originates from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
[51] This is, except in the following section on "the poets", where my focus is on the link between the creation of poetry and walking, and the location is secondary. Historically it happens that many of the poets who walked did so in a rural setting, but I would say that with massive urbanisation, this is rapidly changing.
[52] Thoreau's essay "Walking", published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Thoreau, 1862) shortly after his death from tuberculosis, is probably the definitive essay on walking in nature, and Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (Rousseau, 1782) "laid the groundwork for the ideological edifice within which walking itself would be enshrined" (Solnit, 2001, p. 17).

Mountains of northern England, to the Lake District, where he had gone to school and they were returning to live (Solnit, 2001, p. 83). They were not the first to travel this sort of distance on foot, but they were the first to do so, not out of necessity, but simply for the pleasure of experiencing the landscape. Christopher Morley wrote in 1917, "I always think of him as one of the first to employ his legs as an instrument of philosophy" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 7). In 1794, Dorothy had written to her friend, Jane Pollard, of her "wonderful prowess in the walking way" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 111), and then to her disapproving aunt, that "I cannot pass unnoticed that part of your letter in which you speak of my 'rambling about the country on foot'. So far from considering this as a matter of condemnation, I rather thought it would have given my friends pleasure to hear that I had courage to make use of the strength with which nature has endowed me, when it not only procured me infinitely more pleasure than I should have received from sitting in a post chaise – but was also the means of saving me at least thirty shillings"[53] (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 113).

This was an age when time did not yet equal money, and Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), too, speaks of the saving in cost: "A journey of a hundred and eighty miles, as a pedestrian, would cost me nine or ten days; for which extent the mere amount of expenses at inns would more than defray the fare of the dearest carriage. To this there was no sound reply, except that corresponding expenses would arise, at any rate, on these nine or ten days, wherever I might be – in London, or on the road." But, he concluded: "Happily the scandal of pedestrianism is in one respect more hopefully situated than that of scrofula or leprosy; it is not in any case written in your face" (De

[53]No doubt Aunt Crackanthorp's objection was mainly with regard to class. At that time only the poor walked, and pedestrians were viewed with suspicion in case they might be "footpads", the equivalent of contemporary muggers, who were known to beat up their victims, as they didn't have the means to flee the scene of the crime in the way that highwaymen did. Travellers frequently carried weapons. According to Christopher Morley, this was more likely to happen on main roads. As he put it: "It would be a hardhearted bandit who would despoil the gentler angler of his basket of trouts" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 7).

Tragically Dorothy spent the last twenty years of her life bedridden, after she developed what is now sometimes thought to have been arteriosclerosis. This affected her mental health as well. She did not publish anything during her lifetime, but she kept journals, and was a fine naturalist. She is thought to have been her brother's "muse". While it has been noted that "Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey all borrowed freely from each other" (Holmes, 1989, p. 43), it is less often noted how much Wordsworth and Coleridge borrowed from Dorothy. According to Virginia Woolf, "Dorothy stored the mood in prose, and later William came and bathed in it and turned it into poetry" (Woolf, 1957a, p. 169). Wordsworth referred to her as "A little Prattler among men. … / She gave me eyes, she gave me ears" (Wordsworth, 1807, p. 530). In the words of De Quincey, she "ingraft[ed], by her sexual sense of beauty, upon his masculine austerity that delicacy and those graces" (De Quincey, 1862c, p. 204).

Quincey, 1862b, p. 147). De Quincey was a teenage runaway from Manchester, and was approaching near-starvation in London in 1802, so every penny counted. The pedestrians weren't the only ones counting pennies, though. Since "advanc[ing] by base pedestrian methods, known only to patriarchs of older days and to modern '*tramps*' (so they are called in solemn acts of Parliament)" (De Quincey, 1862b, p. 147) was viewed with suspicion, innkeepers had a shrewd way of evaluating (quite literally) their potential guests:

> Four wax-lights carried before me by obedient mutes, these were but ordinary honours, meant (as old experience had instructed me) for the first engineering step towards effecting a lodgment upon the stranger's purse. In fact the wax-lights are used by innkeepers, both abroad and at home, to 'try the range of their guns.' If the stranger submits quietly, as a good anti-pedestrian ought surely to do, and fires no counter gun by way of protest, then he is recognised at once as passively within range, and amenable to orders. I have always looked upon this fine of five or seven shillings (for wax that you do not absolutely need) as a sort of inaugural honorarium entrance-money; what in jails used to be known as smart money, proclaiming me to be a man *comme il faut*; and no toll in this world of tolls do I pay so cheerfully.[54] (De Quincey, 1862a, p. 150-151)

In the next century, American "poet, pamphleteer, and performer", Vachel Lindsay, earned his keep on his walking tours, by trading in poetry. An extract from one of his pamphlets used on the road:

[54] Olive Schreiner also has an amusing anecdote on pedestrianism in her 1883 novel, *The Story of an African Farm* – "a strange coming and going of feet" (Schreiner, p. 23) – when Bonaparte Blenkins arrives, and the Dutch woman is suspicious: "I'll have no tramps sleeping on my farm," she cries. "If he'd had money wouldn't he have bought a horse? Men who walk," she asserts, are nothing but "thieves, liars, murderers, Rome's priests, seducers" (p. 44).

On a more sober note, this prejudice was reflected more recently, with severe consequences, after Hurricane Katrina, when "Thousands of New Orleaners were prevented and prohibited from self-evacuating the City on foot. … The only way across the bridge was by vehicle" (Bradshaw and Slonsky 2005, section 4, ¶ 2). Joel Hirschhorn refers to this as "Automobile Apartheid", bred by "over fifty years of suburban sprawl dominating land development and home building". In this sprawl culture, "rather than blame bias [of governmental neglect] towards poor people and African Americans," he says, "first class citizens are in motor vehicles; second class Americans are pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit passengers who certainly include poor people, but also millions of middle class Americans" (Hirschhorn, 2005, ¶ 1).

Rhymes to be Traded for Bread

Being new verses by Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Springfield, Illinois, June, 1912. Printed expressly as a substitute for money.

This book is to be used in exchange for the necessities of life on a tramp – journey from the author's home town, through the West and back, during which he will observe the following rules:

(1) Keep away from the cities.
(2) Keeps away from the railroads.
(3) Have nothing to do with money. Carry no baggage.
(4) Ask for dinner about a quarter after eleven.
(5) Ask for supper, lodging, and breakfast about a quarter of five.
(6) Travel alone.
(7) Be neat, truthful, civil, and on the square.
(8) Preach the Gospel of Beauty.

In order to carry out the last rule there will be three exceptions to the rule against baggage. (1) The author will carry a brief printed statement, called "The gospel of beauty" (2) He will carry this book of rhymes for distribution. (3) Also he will carry a small portfolio with pictures, etc., chosen to give an outline of his view of the history of art, especially as it applies to America. (qtd. in Morley, 1917, ¶ 20)

Lindsay's activity has been described as a sort of "poetry outreach program". In "On the Road to Nowhere", he asks: "Did you dare to make the songs / Vanquished workmen need?" (Lindsay, 1929, p. 296). And from the Prologue of "Rhymes to be Traded for Bread": "Shelter and patient hearing, / These were their gifts to him, / … . The rich said 'you are welcome.' / Yea, even the rich were good. / … . The poor who had wandered too, / … . There dark mistrust was dead: / They loved his wizard stories, / They bought his rhymes with bread" (Lindsay, 1929, pp. 294-295). It is said that "chanting, jazz rhythms, and a preaching style characterized his public poetry readings",[55] and together with Langston Hughes he helped define the school of Jazz Poetry.[56] Like a contemporary performance poet, he "persuaded the tired businessman to listen at last. But lo, my tiny reputation as a writer seemed wiped out by my new reputation as an entertainer" (qtd. in Kronick, 2000, ¶ 10). And from "The Traveler-

[55] His poem, "Daniel" (sometimes known as "The Daniel Jazz"), gives a good idea of how this would sound (Lindsay, 1925, pp. 159-161)
[56] According to an anecdote it is said that Lindsay "discovered" Langston Hughes when, in 1925, Hughes was working as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in Washington DC, where Lindsay was dining. Hughes allegedly left his poems alongside Lindsay's plate, and Lindsay included a number of them in his poetry reading that evening (New York Times, 1967, ¶ 6-10).

Heart": "I would be one with the dark-bright night / When sparkling skies and the lightning wed – / Walking on with the vicious wind / By roads whence even the dogs have fled" (Lindsay, 1929, p. 70). Sadly, ground down by poverty and ill-health in the latter part of his life, Lindsay killed himself, by drinking Lysol, on December 5 1931.

The modern belief that walking, if not out of necessity or for exercise, like thinking, is 'doing nothing', is a dilemma.[57] And this is another reason why people walk. In a society in which doing nothing is thought to be wasting time,[58] we need to be seen to be filling it. Virginia Woolf set herself the task of going to buy a pencil in order to justify taking a walk (Woolf, 1930a, pp. 19-29), and American poet AR Ammons gives a new meaning to loafing, when he proposes a trip to buy the daily bread, but he comes to the conclusion that a walk is like a poem. In his essay, "A Poem is a Walk", he writes: "I take the walk to be the externalization of an interior seeking … . Every walk is unreproducible, as is every poem. Even if you walk exactly the same route each time – as with a sonnet – the events along the route cannot be imagined to be the same from day to day, as the poet's health, sight, his anticipations, moods, fears, thoughts cannot be the same" (Ammons, 1967, ¶ 14-16). The "provisional stability" of "clarity, order, meaning, structure [and] rationality" (¶ 11) could be compared to the brief moments during walking when we have two feet on the ground.

If two walks are not the same, neither are any two walkers, whose bodies have their own "dialect"[59] (Donovan, 2003). "The pace at which a poet walks (and thinks),"

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[57] In his novella, *The Walk*, Robert Walser puts his case, when pleading for a reduction in taxes: "'Permit me to inform you,' I said frankly and freely to the tax man … 'that I enjoy, as a poor writer and pen-pusher or *homme de letters*, a very dubious income.' … The superintendent or inspector of taxes said: 'But you're always to be seen out for a walk!'

'Walk,' was my answer, 'I definitely must, to invigorate myself and to maintain contact with the living world, without perceiving which I could not write the half of one more single word, or produce the tiniest poem in verse or prose. Without walking, I would be dead, and my profession, which I love passionately, would be destroyed. Also, without walking and gathering reports, I would not be able to render one single further report, or the tiniest of essays, let alone a real long story. Without walking, I would not be able to make any observations or studies at all. … On a lovely and far-wandering walk a thousand usable and useful thoughts occur to me. Shut in at home, I would miserably decay and dry up'" (Walser, 2002, pp. 85-86).

[58] Christianity went so far as to see doing nothing as potentially sinful. As Carl Honoré points out, "The Benedictine monks kept a tight schedule because they believed the devil would find work for idle hands to do" (Honoré, 2004, p. 29). And a recent satirical t-shirt reads: "Jesus is coming. Look busy!"

[59] The relationship between different parts of one's physiology when walking, could be compared to the "idiolect", or distinct use of words and phrases in combination, of each individual when s/he speaks. The physiology of walking was explored quite explicitly by Graham Weir in "A Cappella".

continues Ammons, “his natural breath-length, the line he pursues, whether forthright and straight or weaving and meditative, his whole ‘air,’ whether of aimlessness or purpose – all these things and many more figure into the ‘physiology’ of the poem he writes” (¶ 15). And there is a “motion common to poems and walks. [It] may be lumbering, clipped, wavering, tripping, mechanical, dance-like, awkward, staggering, slow, etc. But the motion occurs only in the body of the walker or in the body of the words. It can’t be extracted and contemplated. It is nonreproducible and nonlogical. It can’t be translated into another body. There is only one way to know it and that is to enter into it” (¶ 20).

Essayist William Hazlitt (1778-1830) described his experience of walking with the Romantics: “Coleridge’s manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth’s more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more dramatic, the other more lyrical. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption” (Hazlitt, 1823, ¶ 21). Dorothy made a similar observation in a letter to a friend, when she wrote, “at present he is walking, and has been out of doors these two hours though it has rained heavily all the morning. In wet weather he takes out an umbrella, chuses the most sheltered spot, and there walks backwards and forwards and though the length of his walk be sometimes a quarter or half a mile, he is as fast bound within the chosen limits as if by prison walls. He generally composes his verses out of doors, and while he is so engaged he seldom knows how the time slips away, or hardly whether it is rain or fair” (Wordsworth, 1935, pp. 392-393).

De Quincey observed that Wordsworth “was, on the whole, not a well-made man. His legs,” he said, “were pointedly condemned by all female connoisseurs in legs … . A sculptor would certainly have disapproved of their contour” (De Quincey, 1862c, p. 139). Nevertheless, Christopher Morley tells us, “the Opium Eater made the classic pronouncement” (Morley, 1917, ¶ 2) that “with these identical legs Wordsworth must have traversed a distance of 175,000 to 180,000 English miles – a mode of exertion, which, to him stood in the stead of alcohol and all other stimulants whatsoever to the animal spirits” (De Quincey, 1862c, p. 139). According to Thoreau, when a visitor

asked to see Wordsworth's study, his servant remarked: "Here is his library, but his study is out of doors" (Thoreau, 1862, ¶ 11).

Two days after their first meeting in 1798, the 20-year-old Hazlitt accompanied Coleridge (1772-1834) on a six mile walk. "In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice. I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line" (Hazlitt, 1823, ¶ 13). Biographer Richard Holmes observed of Coleridge that he "attracted ardent, youthful, admirers, often at some crisis point in their lives, encouraging confessions and confidences; but he did not have the equanimity or emotional detachment to become a fatherly mentor or tranquil friend, until much later. Indeed one might suggest that part of Coleridge's genius was for wholly disrupting the lives and expectations of most of those who came in close contact with him" (Holmes, 1989, p. 142).

Hazlitt recalled the first time he heard Coleridge preach: "I rose one morning before daylight, to walk ten miles in the mud … . Never the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk as this cold, raw, comfortless one … ." But he wasn't disappointed. "When I got there, the organ was playing the 100th Psalm, and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text, 'And he went up into the mountains to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE.' As he gave out this text, his voice 'rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes', and when he came to the last two words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe" (Hazlitt, 1823, ¶ 5-6).

Ultimately, Hazlitt preferred walking alone. In his essay "On Going a Journey", he wrote: "One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone" (Hazlitt, 1822, Vol. 2, No. 3, ¶ 1). "My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage," he wrote 25 years after his first encounter with Coleridge, "dark, obscure, with longings intimate and unsatisfied;

my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself," he admits, "I owe to Coleridge" (Hazlitt, 1823, ¶ 3).

De Quincey, in his customary "jovial gossip" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 6) and inevitable digression,[60] recalled walking with Hazlitt: "Twice, I think, or it might be three times, we walked for a few miles together: it was in London, late at night, and after leaving a party. Though depressed by the spectacle of a mind always in agitation from the gloomier passions, I was yet amused by the pertinacity with which he clung, through bad reasons or no reasons, to any public slander floating against men in power, or in the highest rank." During "one of these nightly walks", Hazlitt recalled to De Quincey how he had once followed close behind and observed the King of Hanover, at that time Duke of Cumberland, out walking. De Quincey wrote:

> It is the custom in England, wheresoever the persons of the royal family are familiar to the public eye … that all passengers in the streets, on seeing them, walk bareheaded, or make some signal of dutiful respect. On this occasion all the men who met the prince took off their hats, the prince acknowledging every such obeisance by a separate bow. Pall-Mall being finished, and its whole harvest of salutations gathered in, next the Duke came to Cockspur Street. But here, and taking a station close to the crossing, which daily he beautified and polished with his broom, stood a negro sweep … yet the creature could take off his rag of a hat and earn the bow of a prince as well as any white native of St. James. What was to be done? … The Duke of Cumberland, seeing no counsel at hand to argue either the *pro* or the *contra*, found himself obliged to settle the question *de plano*; so, drawing out his purse, he kept his hat as rigidly settled on his head as William Penn and Mead did before the recorder of London. All Pall-Mall applauded: *contradicente* Gulielmo Hazlitt, and Hazzlit only. The black swore that the prince gave him half-a-crown … whether he was more thankful for the money gained, or angry for the honour lost did not transpire … 'No matter,' said Hazlitt … Was he not … a fellow-subject, capable of committing treason, and paying taxes into the treasury? Not perhaps in any direct shape, but indirect taxes most certainly on his tobacco – and even on his broom?
>
> These things could not be denied. But still, when my turn came for speaking, I confessed frankly that (politics apart) my feeling in the case went along with

[60] Virginia Woolf said of him that "Most often he spreads himself out in a waste of verbosity … . He required, too, endless leisure and ample elbow-room. He wanted time to soliloquise and loiter …" (Woolf, 1926, pp. 36-37).

> the Duke's. The bow would not be so useful to the black as the half crown.[61] (De Quincey, 1862b, pp. 303-307[62])

In 1791 Wordsworth wrote to his friend, the Rev. Robert Jones, with whom he'd shared an experience of walking in the Alps, and to whom he dedicated his "Descriptive Sketches taken during a Pedestrian Tour among the Alps": "You know well how great is the difference between two companions lolling in a post-chaise, and two travellers plodding slowly along the road, side by side, each with his little knapsack of necessaries upon his shoulders. How much more of heart between the two latter!"

Early in June of 1797, Coleridge "set out on a long summer walk" (Holmes, 1989, p. 148), from Nether Stowey to Racedown in Dorsetshire, to visit Wordsworth. They had met only briefly in Bristol two years earlier. Coleridge "preached at the Unitarian Chapel at Bridgewater on Sunday 4 June, and then pounded the forty-odd miles southwards in a day and a half, reaching the road going down from Crewkerne on the early evening of 5 June.

"Here, at a field gate that still exists, he paused to look over the little valley of the River Synderford, from the hillside near Pilsdon Pen. Below him, across a field of corn, he could see the square, brick Georgian façade of Racedown Lodge among a little grove of beech trees, with a woman's figure working in the vegetable garden behind." Dorothy Wordsworth "looked up, and he vaulted the gate and hurried down through corn towards her" (Holmes, 1989, p. 148). Dorothy wrote to Mary Hutchinson, her cousin and future sister-in-law, who had left Racedown just the day before: "You had a great loss in not seeing Coleridge. He is a wonderful man. … At first I thought him very plain, that is, for about three minutes … . But if you hear him speak …"[63] (Wordsworth, 1935, pp. 168-169). Coleridge said of meeting Dorothy,

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[61] After a "prosaic" marriage and finally divorce, Hazlitt's first wife, Sarah, "pulled on her boots and set off on a walking tour through Scotland, while Hazlitt, incapable of attachment or comfort, wandered from inn to inn" (Woolf, 1957b, p. 177). Sarah's 200 mile tramp was recorded in her *Journal of My Trip to Scotland*, and William published an account of his affair with the daughter (Sarah Walker) of an inn-keeper, the reason he had requested the divorce, but who lost interest in him after it, in *Libor Amoris* (Hazlitt, 1948).

[62] This story is told over six pages.

[63] According to Virginia Woolf, "The truth about Coleridge the talker seems to have been that he rapt some listeners to the seventh heaven; bored others to extinction; and made one foolish girl giggle irrepressibly. … But there is one point upon which all who listened are agreed; not one of them could

"Miss Wordsworth is a most exquisite young woman in her mind, & heart" (Coleridge, 1971, p. 327). The friendship between William, Coleridge and herself, which Dorothy held together, became one of the greatest of their lives. For William and Coleridge it "was based on an attraction of temperamental opposites" (Holmes, 1989, pp. 149-151). In Coleridge's Conversation Poem, "The Nightingale", describing a night expedition to listen to the birds north of Holford-Stowey, which only sing for a few weeks each spring, he addressed "My Friend, and thou our Sister" (Coleridge, 1798, p. 152).

About halfway between London and the Lake District, "A Northamptonshire Pheasant" (as he referred to himself) poet John Clare (1793-1864) was isolated. "The winter comes; I walk alone / I want no bird to sing," he wrote. "To those who keep their hearts their own / The winter is the spring" (Clare, 2003). But Clare, who was an unfortunate victim of "straddling social classes", clearly had ambivalent feelings about his solitude.[64] In his new book, *Edge of the Orison*, Iain Sinclair examines the effect that going to London had on Clare, who had written (in a style which Sinclair compares to Jack Kerouac [Lang, 2005])[65]:

> I lovd this solitary disposition from a boy and felt a curiosity to wander about spots where I had never been before I remember one incident of this feeling when I was very young it cost my parents some anxiety it was in summer and I started off in the morning to get rotten sticks from the woods but I had a feeling to wander about the fields and I indulged it. I had often seen the large heath calld Emmonsales stretching its yellow furze from my eye into unknown solitudes when I went with the mere openers and my curiosity urgd me to steal an oppertunity to explore it that morning I had imagind that the worlds end was at the edge of the orison[66] and that a days journey was able to find it so I went on with my heart full of hopes pleasures and discoverys expecting when I got to the brink of the world that I coud look down like looking into a large pit and see into its secrets the same as I believd I coud see heaven by looking into the water so I eagerly wanderd on and rambled among the furze the whole day till I got out of my knowledge when the very wild flowers and birds seemd to forget me and I imagind they were the inhabitants of new countrys

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remember a single word he said. All, however, with astonishing unanimity are agreed that it was 'like' – the waves of the ocean, the flowing of a mighty river, the splendour of the Aurora Borealis, the radiance of the Milky Way" (Woolf, 1930b, p. 72). His daughter, Sara, said of him that "he was almost always on the star-paved road, taking in the whole heavens in his circuit" (Woolf, 1930c, p. 75).

[64] Whether his sense of isolation was made more acute by the death of his twin sister shortly after birth, is also worth considering.

[65] Clare's words have all been retained with the original spelling and punctuation.

[66] It is almost certain that this was a simple misspelling of the word horizon on Clare's part, and that he did not intend any play on the archaic word orison, meaning prayer.

> the very sun seemd to be a new one and shining in a different quarter of the sky still I felt no fear my wonder seeking happiness had no room for it I was finding new wonders every minute and was walking in a new world often wondering to my self that I had not found the end of the old one the sky still touched the ground in the distance as usual and my childish wisdoms was puzzled in perplexitys night crept on before I had time to fancy the morning was bye the white moth had begun to flutter beneath the bushes the black snail was out upon the grass and the frog was leaping across the rabbit tracks on his evening journeys and the little mice was nimbling about and twittering their little ear piercing song with the hedge cricket whispering the hour of waking spirits was at hand when I knew not which way to turn but chance put me in the right track and when I got into my own fields I did not know them everything seemd so different the church peeping over the woods coud hardly reconcile me. (Clare, 1983, pp. 33-34)

It was a similar experience for Clare later when he returned from London. He made four visits to the city, and attended dinners for *London Magazine* (to which he contributed), where De Quincey "swam into his ken" and "Coleridge talked for three hours" (Blunden, 1920, p. 24), but these "did not win him entrée into" the literary set; instead they just alienated him from most of his fellow villagers. "I live here among the ignorant like a lost man," he wrote to his publisher. "They hardly dare talk in my company" (qtd. in Martin, 1865, "New Struggles", ¶ 8).

"I had a romantic sort of notion about authors," Clare wrote, "and had an anxious desire to see them fancying they were beings different to other men but the spell was soon broken when I became acquainted with them …" He described Coleridge as "a man with a venerable white head fluent of speech not a 'silver tong[ue]d hamilton' his words hung in their places at a quiet pace from a drawl in good set marching order so that you would suppose he had learnt what he intended to say before he came" (Clare, 1983, p. 137). Hazlitt, "if you was to watch his face for a month you would not catch a smile there … when he enters a room he comes stooping with his eyes in his hands as it were throwing under gazes round at every corner as if he smelt a dun or thief ready to sieze him by the collar and demand his money or his life … you woud wonder were his poetry came from that is scattered so thickly over his writings".[67] And the "little artless simple seeming body somthing of a child over grown in a blue

[67] According to De Quincey, it was being jilted by the inn-keeper's daughter, Sarah Walker – who "had partly engaged her faith to Hazlitt as his future wife, whilst secretly she was holding a correspondence, too tender to be misinterpreted, with a gentleman resident in the same establishment" – which finally sealed Hazlitt's mood. "*There* went out the last light that threw a guiding ray over the storm-vexed course of Hazlitt" (De Quincey, 1862a, p. 302).

coat and black neckerchief for his dress is singular with his hat in his hand [who] steals gently among the company with a smile turning timidly round the room" was "De Quincey the Opium Eater that abstruse thinker in Logic and Metaphysics XYZ" (Clare, 1983, p. 135).

At first Clare was a curiosity in fashionable London circles. A Mrs. Emmerson "was at one word the best friend I found," he wrote of his first visit to London, "and my expectations are looking no further her correspondence with me began early in my public life and grew pretty thick as it went on I fancyd it a fine thing to correspond with a lady and by degrees grew up into an admirer some times writing as I felt sometimes as I fancyd and some times foolish[l]y when I coud not account for why I did it I at length requested her portrait … she sent it and flatterd my vanity in return it was beautifuly done by Behn[e]s the sculpter but bye and bye my knowledge [of] the world sickened my roma[n]tic feelings I grew up in friends[hip] and lost in flattery afterwards so she took to patronizing one of Colridges who had written a visionary ode on Beauty in Knights quarterly Magaz[in]e in whom she discovered much genius and calld him on that stake one of the first Lyric poets in England – she then whisht for her picture agen and I readily agreed to part with it – for the artificial flower of folly had run to seed" (Clare, 1983, pp. 130-131).

Clare was "suddenly exposed to what London was," Sinclair continues, and it was "a nightmare … for him, but having done it there's no way back into the old self". In his book, Sinclair – for whom "the power of landscape and the transgressive nature of walking remain central to his work" (Lang, 2005, audio) – retraces Clare's journey (the book was originally going to be titled *Journey Out of London*), and he explores more closely, territory that he passed through in his last book, *London Orbital*, while walking on the M25 (the second in his walking trilogy, begun with *Lights Out for the Territory*[68]): Epping Forest and the asylum where Clare was incarcerated for being "addicted to Poetical prosing" (Bate, 2003, p. 5).[69] In 1837, after four years there, "He did this phenomenal three and a half day march back to his village north of

[68] He describes it as a "hobbled trilogy" which "worries at everything I have to say on the subject" of walking and urban development (Loydell, 2005, question 11).
[69] The period Sinclair refers to is 1821-30, when, as he says, "the Romantic poetry franchise went out of fashion. Clare plunged from popular success (first book syndrome, great pitch: Peasant Poet), to obscurity and madness" (Loydell, 2005, question 11). In Sinclair's book, Clare's insanity is said to "foreshadow the utter madness of London stretched into a straight line".

Peterborough and I always wanted to repeat that journey," says Sinclair. Clare wrote an account of his *Journey Out of Essex* (Clare 1983, pp. 153-161), in which he said, on the first night "I lay down with my head towards the north, to show myself the steering-point in the morning" (Clare, 1983, p. 154). And "on the third day I satisfied my hunger by eating the grass by the road side which seemed to taste something like bread I was hungry & eat heartily till I was satisfied" (Clare, 1983, p. 159). "But on the last day I chewed tobacco & never felt hungry afterwards … . I heard the voice of freedom … & could have travelled to York with a penny loaf and a pint of beer for I should not have been fagged in body only one of my old shoes had nearly lost the sole before I started & let in the water & silt the first day & made me crippled and lame to the end of my journey" (Clare, 1841, p. 294).

"So the book starts with a reprisal of his journey," Sinclair goes on, "walking at exactly the same dates in July when it's sweltering hot and it was weirder than the M25[70] because I found that the whole of middle England was just deserted. There's nothing there once you're off the motorway. In the villages the pubs are shut, there were no obvious farmers, abandoned airfields, huge industrial fields of corn and a very very weird landscape" (Atherton, 2005, question 8).

Though he had been overwhelmed by the broadening of his horizon, what Clare dreaded more than anything was enclosure, as he wrote in "The Village Minstrel": "There once were lanes in natures freedom dropt / There once were paths that every valley wound - / Inclosure came & every path was stopt / Each tyrant fixed his sign where paths were found / To hint a trespass now who crossed the ground / Justice is made to speak as they command / The high road now must be each stinted bound / – Inclosure, thourt a curse upon the land / & tasteless was the wretch who thy existence plannd" (Clare, 1821, p. 169). He was writing here about the Enclosure Acts which caused the "legal expropriation of the commons – land belonging to all and crucial, traditionally, for the subsistence of the rural poor"[71] (Miller, 2002, ¶ 5). At the same time he predicted the final erosion of the "ways of passage for pedestrians"

[70] The journey was exactly the same length as his walk along the M25
[71] The Enclosure Acts were passed between 1760 and 1830. Driving people off the land also meant that many were forced to move to towns where workers were needed for the new factories that were opening up.

(McDonald, 2005) reported by Sinclair, and his own incarceration for the last 27 years of his life.[72]

He had declared in his melancholy that he wanted no birdsong, but Clare was an extraordinary observer of nature, and thought to have been one of the finest ornithologists in British history. Much like Dorothy Wordsworth, he was more interested in describing what he saw and heard on the "lower earth", as he called it – in the words of fifteenth century Indian poet, Kabir, the tinkling of "the anklets on the feet of an insect as it walks" (qtd. in Brussat & Brussat, n.d.) – rather than veering into transcendental interpretation (Angus Fletcher on Silverblatt, 2004c, audio).

But even for someone with an education, London was hard. "I really cannot on any account venture to London unless upon the certainty of a regular income," Wordsworth wrote to a friend. "Living in London must always be expensive, however frugal you may be. As to the article of eating, that is not much; but dress, and lodging, are *extremely* expensive" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 115). And Dorothy, "writing in a front room in one of the busiest streets in Bristol", could "scarcely conceive how the jarring contrast between the sounds which are now forever ringing in my ears and the sweet sounds of Allfoxden, makes me long for the country again. After three years residence in retirement" she found "a city in feeling, sound, and prospect is hateful" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 196).

In August of 1803, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Dorothy set off on a walking tour of Scotland. Just two weeks before, Wordsworth had responded to his first letter from the 18-year-old De Quincey, in which he wrote: "I am going with my friend Coleridge and my Sister upon a tour into Scotland for six weeks or two months. … I need not add that it will give me great pleasure to see you at Grasmere, if you should ever come this way"[73] (Wordsworth, 1935, pp. 333-334). Unfortunately this time

[72] A village doctor, Skrimshire, "condemned him to be shut up" (Blunden, 1920, p. 39), but he never stopped writing, and left behind over 3500 poems.

[73] In the spring of 1809, De Quincey settled in Grasmere, just a year before Coleridge left there for good. De Quincey gradually fell out with the Wordsworths. Dorothy was devastated when he cut down her wild plants at Dove Cottage, where the Wordsworths had lived for eight years, to let in more light. And William, who did not approve of cross-class marriages, was not happy when, in 1817, De Quincey married a local farm girl. It proved to be a lasting marriage, however, and Peggy bore him eight children. (De Quincey himself was one of eight.) Mainly they were put out by his opium addiction. In 1826 he moved to Edinburgh.

Wordsworth and Coleridge did not get along well.[74] Wordsworth said later of his friend that he seemed "in bad spirits and somewhat too much in love with his own dejection" (Moorman, 1965, p. 591). While Coleridge said of Wordsworth, that he "himself a brooder over his painful hypochondriacal Sensations, was not my fittest companion" (Coleridge, 1971, p. 1010). Dorothy's "happiest moments were passed tramping beside a jibbing horse on a wet Scottish road without certainty of bed or supper. All she knew was that there was some sight ahead, some grove of trees to be noted, some waterfall to be inquired into.[75] On they tramped hour after hour in silence for the most part, though Coleridge … would suddenly begin to debate aloud the true meaning of the words majestic, sublime, and grand. They had to trudge on foot because the horse had thrown the cart over a bank and the harness was only mended with string and pocket-handkerchiefs. They were hungry, too, because Wordsworth had dropped the chicken and the bread into the lake, and they had nothing else for dinner. They were uncertain of the way, and did not know where they would find lodging: all they knew was that there was a waterfall ahead. At last Coleridge could stand it no longer" (Woolf, 1957a, p. 170-171). Dorothy "shivered at the thought of [Coleridge] being sickly and alone, travelling from place to place" (Moorman, 1965, p. 592), but on the fifteenth day, they parted company. Coleridge "now tried to exorcise his opium demons in a mad, non-stop, walking bout of eight days, during which he covered 263 miles"[76] (Holmes, 1989, p. 353). Wordsworth responded to De Quincey on 6 March 1804, that "We had a most delightful tour of six weeks in

[74] This incident recalls Leslie Stephen's observation, in his essay about walking tours, "In Praise of Walking": "each walk is a little drama itself, with a definite plot with episodes and catastrophes, according to the requirements of Aristotle; and it is naturally interwoven with all the thoughts, the friendships, and the interests that form the staple of ordinary life" (Stephen, 1956, pg. no. unavailable).

[75] It was the opinion of many that she should have published the journal she kept on this tour (it was only published after her death), considered to be her finest writing, and described by De Quincey as "absolutely unique in its class". In De Quincey's opinion, Dorothy should have become a professional writer. He saw her as one of "those women who, perhaps from strength of character, have refused to make such a [marriage] connection where it promised little of elevated happiness … . Miss Wordsworth had several offers," he wrote around 1838, and even "one from Hazlitt; all of them she rejected decisively. And she did right." But he went on to suggest that writing "is such an occupation useful to a woman without children". Dorothy had helped raise William's children, but De Quincey suggests that "Nephews and nieces, whilst young and innocent, are as good almost as sons and daughters to a fervid and loving heart that has carried them in her arms from the hour they were born. But, after a nephew has grown into a huge hulk of a man, six feet high, and as stout as a bullock; after he has come to have children of his own, lives at a distance, and finds occasion to talk much of oxen and turnips – no offence to him! – he ceases to be an object of any profound sentiment" (De Quincey, 1862c, pp. 200-210).

[76] In 1779, when the Wordsworths and Coleridge travelled to Germany together, Coleridge had written: "I partook of the Hanoverian's & Dane's wines, & Pine apples – told them some hundred Jokes, and passed as many of my own. Danced all together a sort of wild dance on the Deck – Wordsworth and Sister bad as ever" (Coleridge, 1971, pp. 425-6).

Scotland; our pleasure however was not a little dashed by the necessity under which Mr. Coleridge found himself of leaving us, at the end of something like a fortnight, from ill health; and a dread of the rains (his complaint being Rheumatic)" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 369). The relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge was never quite the same after this.

De Quincey describes his forty-mile all-night walk from Bridgewater, after meeting Coleridge for the first time, in 1807:

> About ten o'clock at night I took my leave of him; and feeling that I could not easily go to sleep after the excitement of the day, and fresh from the sad spectacle of powers so majestic already besieged by decay, I determined to return to Bristol through the coolness of the night. The roads, though, in fact, a section of the great highway between seaports so turbulent as Bristol and Plymouth, were as quiet as garden-walks. Once only I passed through the expiring fires of a village fair or wake: that interruption excepted, through the whole stretch of forty miles from Bridgewater to the Hot-wells, I saw no living creature but a surly dog, who followed me for a mile along a park-wall, and a man, who was moving around in the half-way town of Cross. The turnpike-gates were all opened by a mechanical contrivance from a bedroom window; I seemed to myself in solitary possession of the whole country. The summer night was divinely calm; no sound, except once or twice the cry of a child as I was passing the windows of cottages, ever broke upon the utter silence; and all things conspired to throw back my thoughts upon that extraordinary man whom I had just quitted. (De Quincey, 1862c, p. 67)

Coleridge had confided in De Quincey about his opium addiction, when the latter mentioned "that a toothache had obliged me to take a few drops of laudanum" (De Quincey, 1862c, p. 67). De Quincey had also witnessed the estrangement between Coleridge and his wife. "[He] paused upon her entrance; his features, however … did not relax into a smile. In a frigid tone he said, whilst turning to me, 'Mrs. Coleridge;' in some slight way he then presented me to her: I bowed; and the lady almost immediately retired" (De Quincey, 1862c, pp. 60-61). De Quincey discovered later, as he goes on to explain:

> A young lady became a neighbour, and a daily companion of Coleridge's walks, whom I will not describe more particularly, than by saying, that intellectually she was much superior to Mrs. Coleridge. That superiority alone, when made conspicuous by its effects in winning Coleridge's regard and society, could not but be deeply mortifying to a young wife. However, it was moderated to her feelings by two considerations: - 1. That the young lady was

> much too kind-hearted to have designed any annoyance in this triumph, or to express any exaltation; 2. That no shadow of suspicion settled upon the moral conduct or motives of either party: the young lady was always attended by her brother; she had no personal charms; and it was manifest that mere intellectual sympathies, in reference to literature and natural scenery, had associated them in their daily walks. …
>
> Mrs. Coleridge, not having the same relish for long walks or rural scenery … was condemned to a daily renewal of this trail. Accidents of another kind embittered it still further: often it would happen that the walking party returned drenched in rain; in which case the young lady, with a laughing gaiety, and evidently unconscious of any liberty she was taking, or any wound that she was inflicting, would run up to Mrs. Coleridge's wardrobe, array herself, without leave asked, in Mrs. Coleridge's dresses, and make herself merry with her own unceremoniousness and Mrs. Coleridge's gravity. (De Quincey, 1862c, pp. 63-64)

From her point of view, Dorothy wrote to Mary Hutchinson about Sara Coleridge, on April 27 1801: "She is much, very much to be pitied, for when one party is ill-matched the other must necessarily be so too. She would have made a very good wife to many another man, but for Coleridge!!" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 273). And then six weeks later, with exasperation: "Mrs. Coleridge is a most extraordinary character – she is the lightest weakest silliest woman! She sent some clean clothes on Thursday to meet C. (the first time she ever did such a thing in her life). … So insensible and irritable she never can come to good and poor C.!" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 303).

Dorothy was reminded of how she irritated Sara Coleridge with her wet clothes, when she was met with a similarly cool reception on arriving drenched at an Inn. She wrote to Mary Hutchinson on April 16 1802: "A heavy rain came on, and when we passed Luff's house we were very wet … . I had Joanna's beautiful shawl on over my Spenser – Alas the *Gloss* is gone from it! but indeed I do not see it the worse. When we reached the Inn we were very wet. The Landlady looked sour enough upon us … but there was a young woman, I suppose a visitor, very smart in a Bonnet with an artificial flower, who was kindness itself. She did more for me than Mrs Coleridge would do for her own sister under the circumstances. She made a smart Lady of me at once, and I came down to William, who was sitting by a bright fire that had sprung up as if by magic …" (Wordsworth, 1935, p. 290).

On what constituted the language of poetry, Wordsworth and Coleridge also differed. Wordsworth claimed that rustic language was the "real language of men" (Wordsworth, 1802a, p. 57). But Coleridge argued that "Examination of the tenets peculiar to Mr Wordsworth – Rustic life (above all, low and rustic life) especially unfavourable to the formation of a human diction – The best parts of language the products of philosophers, not clowns or shepherds – Poetry essentially ideal and generic – The language of Milton as much the language of real life, yea, incomparably more so than that of the cottager"[77] (Coleridge, 1817, p. 188). He declared that prose was "words in their best order", but poetry was "the *best* words in the best order" (Coleridge, 1909, p. 54). "I measured it from side to side / Twas three feet long, and two feet wide" (Wordsworth, 1802b, p. 120), from the *Lyrical Ballads*, are lines of Wordsworth's that have frequently been ridiculed, though as Philip Hensher observes, "how anyone could laugh at the size of the grave of a child, set out like this, is beyond explanation"[78] (Hensher, 2000, ¶ 4).

Beat poet Jonathan Williams, also a peripatetic hailing from North Carolina (along with Ammons), sides with Wordsworth. "My early book *Blues and Roots* was done by walking a big piece of the Appalachian Trail: I listened to mountain people for over a thousand miles and I really heard some amazing stuff. And I left it pretty much as I heard it. I didn't have to do anything but organize it a little bit, crystallize it. That's the thing I love about found material – you wake it up, you 'make' it into something" (Beam, 2003, question 28). His "Custodian of a Field of Whisky Bushes By the Nolichucky River Speaks": "took me a pecka real ripe tomaters up / into the Grassy Gap / one night / and two quarts of good stockade / and just laid there / sippin and tastin and lookin agin the moon / at them sort of fish eyes in the jar / you get when its right / boys Im talkin bout somethin / good"[79] (Williams, 1969[80]).

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[77] They diverged, too, on matters of religion. Coleridge said: "we found our data dissimilar" (Holmes, 1989, p. 191), and described Wordsworth as "a Republican & at least a *Semi*-atheist" (Holmes, 1989, p. 121).

[78] Samuel Johnson had parodied 'simple' verse with, "I put my hat upon my head / And walked into the Strand, / And there I met another man / Whose hat was in his hand (Wordsworth, 1802a, p. 85). Celeste Langan, in *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Langan, 1995) proposes that "The poet and the vagrant together constitute a society based on the twin principles of freedom of speech and freedom of movement" (qtd. in Landry 2001, ¶ 4).

[79] Williams also wrote the prefaces for *White Trash Cooking I* and *II* (Mickler 1986 and 1997), which his Jargon Press published.

[80] This book has no page numbers and no table of contents. The poem appears on the 10th page from the end of the book.

In 1962, writing his "Autobiography: New York", Charles Reznikoff found himself "Walking along the highway, / I smell the yellow flowers of a shrub, / watch the starlings on a lawn, perhaps – / but why are all these / speeding away in automobiles, / where are they off to / in such a hurry? / They must be going to hear wise men / and to look at beautiful women, / and I am just a fool / to be loitering here alone" (Reznikoff, 1977, p. 27).

By 1969, Joni Mitchell was heading for Woodstock. "I came upon a child of God / He was walking along the road," she sang. "Then can I walk beside you / I have come here to lose the smog / … We are stardust / Billion year old carbon / We are golden / Caught in the devil's bargain / And we've got to get ourselves / Back to the garden"[81] (Mitchell, 1970).

And in 2004, Rita Dove, Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993-1995, in "Looking Up from the Page, I Am Reminded of This Mortal Coil", wrote: "What good is the brain without traveling shoes? / We put our thoughts out there on the cosmos express / … But I suspect we don't / travel easily at all, though we keep / making better wheels – / smaller phones and wider webs" (Dove, 2004, p. 136).

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[81] Though Mitchell is not traditionally known as a poet, this is the last poem in Camille Paglia's *Break, Blow, Burn*, her collection of what she considers to be 43 of the world's best poems. Paglia regards "Woodstock [as] the greatest poem written in English, by man or woman, after Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy'". Though an atheist, poets, says Paglia, have "the ability to think cosmically, and to relate the self to that vast metaphysics, keying it to the language of the body" (Silverblatt, 2005a, audio). I would describe this as a marrying of the transcendental and the immediate.

Stavros Melissinos, "the poet-sandalmaker of Athens" says: "A writer who does nothing but write is like the moon, which gives off some light, but borrowed from the sun. A writer needs first-hand experience, which only working in another field can give him. Otherwise he is rewriting what he has read in other books." Melissinos recognises the importance of comfortable footwear, and all the priestesses at the Olympic flame ceremony walk in his sandals. His customers have included Rudolph Nureyev, Margo Fonteyn, and the Beatles. "First of all one of them comes," he said, "the intellectual one … Lennon. He told me he had found my works somewhere. Then they all came in, like the seven dwarfs. There were bodyguards too and we had to close the shop because their followers would have wrecked the place. They all bought many pairs. Later my children asked why I did not ask for their autographs." To which he replied: "Why did they not ask for mine? I will be around long after the Beatles." And he was right. Before the Olympics, he was evicted from the premises his family had occupied since the twenties, because the landlords wanted to get more money for the space. Now he has relocated to Psiri. To find Stavros and his sandals now, "just cross the square in front of the metro station and walk towards the intersection of Athinas Street and Ermou. Take a left on Ermou and walk two blocks and go right on Ag Theklas Street and he is at #2. This is actually a very suitable location because this is Lord Byron's old neighborhood – he lived there for a period of time on 11 Aghias Theklas Street. That was the period when he was in love with the daughter of the Makres family. You can call him (Stavros, not Byron) at 210-3219247 /6938083805" (Athens Guide, n.d.).

Like Coleridge, the solitary walks of De Quincey were not unaccompanied as he was often under the influence of opium as he walked. For both men, initially taken as a pain-reliever, it later became an addiction. According to De Quincey, Coleridge tried to draw a distinction between "our separate careers as opium-eaters", suggesting that he merely used it for pain relief of his rheumatism, while De Quincey was an addict. "And vainly, indeed, does Coleridge attempt to differentiate two cases which ran into absolute identity," wrote De Quincey, "differing only as rheumatism differs from toothache." He then points to Coleridge's unreliability regarding facts: "The truth is, that inaccuracy as to facts and citations from books was in Coleridge a mere necessity of nature … . Everything that Coleridge had relied upon as a citation from a book in support of his own hypothesis, turns out to be pure fabrication of his dreams."[82] And he concludes that Coleridge's account of the subject was "perfect moonshine, and, like the sculptured imagery of the pendulous lamp in 'Christabel,' (Coleridge, 1797, pp. 146-165): 'All carved from the carver's brain'" (De Quincey, 1862b, pp. 6-7).

Belgian-Mexican artist, Francis Alys, famous for his walking performance art pieces, as a tribute to De Quincey, created a piece called *Narcotourism*, in which he walked Copenhagen from 6-12 May 1996, "under the influence of a different drug each day". He charted the effects "through photographs, notes, or any other media that bec[a]me relevant" [83] (qtd. in Basualdo, 1999, ¶ 8).

Ammons concludes:

> If you were brought into a classroom and asked to teach walks, what would you teach? …

[82] Coleridge became well known for plagiarism, which Thomas McFarland has referred to as literary "kleptomania" (McFarland, 1980). Since Coleridge's plagiarism "begins in translation – and specifically the attempt to carry over and interpret German literature and philosophy into an insular, English culture. If psychologically it was a form of kleptomania," writes Richard Holmes, arguably downplaying the seriousness of the transgression, "then intellectually it was a form of smuggling valuables across a closed border" (Holmes, 1989, p. 232).

[83] Conceptual artist, Sophie Calle, did a similar kind of walking ('stalking') art – following randomly chosen strangers with her camera, as a "way of reacquainting herself with Paris after a long absence" (Danto, 1992, ¶ 1). Paul Auster later fictionalised Calle via the character Maria in his novel *Leviathan*, which he prefaces with thanks to Ms. Calle for "permission to mix fact with fiction" (Auster, 1992). Calle then decided "to live out the life of her fictional counterpart" (Judah, 2001, ¶ 13); and she and Auster went on to document the process in a book and exhibition entitled *Double Game* (Calle & Auster, 1999).

> The first thought that would occur to you is, What have other people said about walks? You could collect all historical references to walks and all descriptions of walks, find out the average length of walks, through what kind of terrain they have most often proceeded, what kind of people have enjoyed walks and why and how walks have reflected the societies in which they occurred. In short, you could write a history of walks.
>
> Or you could call in specialists. You might find a description of a particularly disturbing or interesting walk and then you might call in a botanist to retrace that walk with you and identify all the leaves and berries for you: or you might take along a sociologist to point out to you that the olive trees mentioned were at the root – forgive me – of feudal society: or you might take along a surveyor to give you a close reading in inches and degrees: or you might take a psychoanalyst along to ask good questions about what is the matter with people who take walks: or you might take a physiologist to provide you with astonishment that people can walk at all. Each specialist would no doubt come up with important facts and insights, but your attention, focused on the cell structure of the olive leaf, would miss the main event, the walk itself. (Ammons, 1967, ¶ 22-25)[84]

Ammons is, of course, using a walk to illustrate a poem, but the mirror image serves us as well.

The romantics in the Lake District had a love affair with their environment, as did Walt Whitman with Manhattan ("Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan, / Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky, / … What stranger miracles are there?" (Whitman, 1950, pp. 306-307), but for Charles Baudelaire, arguably the first urban poet (he sometimes competes with Whitman for the title), his relationship with Paris was more ambivalent. His bohemian lifestyle meant relentless financial struggle after his private income ran out, and he was constantly moving to escape his creditors. At one point he wrote to his mother, "I am used to physical suffering to a certain degree. I am adept at making do with two shirts under torn trousers and a jacket which lets in the wind, and I am so experienced in using straw or even paper to plug up the holes in my shoes that moral suffering is almost the only kind I perceive as suffering. However, I must admit I have reached the point where I don't make any sudden

[84] I am aware of the irony, that this is what I am engaged in doing. This, perhaps, illustrates the nature of theory, that it is purely academic, and speculative, until the walk is actually taken.

movements or walk a lot because I fear that I might tear my clothes even more"[85] (qtd. in Benjamin, 1938, p. 72).

Like a destructive, but addictive, relationship, Jules Laforgue said of him that he was the first to speak about Paris "as someone condemned to live in the capital day after day" (qtd. in Benjamin, 1938, pp. 55). Unlike Shelley, who captured the directness and harshness of London ("Hell is a city much like London – / A populous and a smoky city" (Shelley, 1819, p. 346), Baudelaire "owed his enjoyment of this society as someone who had already half withdrawn from it. In the attitude of someone with this kind of enjoyment he let the spectacle of the crowd act upon him. The deepest fascination of this kind of spectacle lay in the fact that as it intoxicated him it did not blind him to the horrible social reality" (Benjamin, 1938, p. 59). But for the *flâneur*, it is the "pageantry of movement" (Baudelaire, 1869a, p. 99[86]) that he needs. As Christopher Morley put it, even "minor poets struggling home with the Saturday night marketing … may see visions" as they witness "this various, grotesque, pathetic, and surprising humanity"; what "Whitman and O. Henry knew in brimming measure, [which] comes by gulps and twinges to us all". And then on a more romantic note, Morley added: "In the teeming ooze and ocean bottoms of our atlantic humanity he finds rich corals and rainbow shells, hospitality, reverence, love, and beauty" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 18).

No city is better for finding material than New York, whose streets have known an abundance of poets. "Let's take a walk," wrote Frank O'Hara, "you / and I in spite of the / weather if it rains hard / on our toes / we'll stroll like poodles / and be washed down a / gigantic scenic gutter" (O'Hara, 1998, p. 14).

[85] There is a similar story about Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) who only "had one pair of shoes" while he was at Oxford. "He stopped being able to leave his room to visit anybody because his toes were poking through, and a kindly don, worried about this brilliant man who couldn't walk around town, got one of the college servants to leave a new pair of shoes outside his door. Johnson coming out in the morning found these and of course took it as a terrible insult and threw them away" (Mullan on Bragg, 27 October 2005).

[86] This piece, "Any Where Out of This World", from the collection *Paris Spleen*, is a good example of Baudelaire's famous prose poems.

As essayist Phillip Lopate says of objectivist[87] poet, Charles Reznikoff, "Walking was both a way for the poet to be alone and – controlledly, indirectly – with others, knowing the spark of intimacy would last only a short while and incur no further obligations" (Lopate, 2004, section 3, ¶ 6). Of himself, Lopate says, "I was not looking to find romance itself, so much as to be invaded by sharp glimpses of heart-stopping beauty, to take back with me and muse over in my rooms"[88] (Lopate, 2004, section 6, ¶ 3).

Reznikoff wrote: "I like the sound of the street – / but I, apart and alone, / beside an open window / and behind a closed door" (Reznikoff, 1977, p. 27). Unlike Whitman, who "liked to sit by the front window in a chair and not just watch the world walk by, but talk to people outside" (JD McClatchy on Silverblatt, 2005b, audio).

Baudelaire wrote in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life", about his friend Constantin Guys, whom he refers to simply as M.G., that he "loves mixing with the crowds [but] loves being incognito … . And so, walking or quickening his pace, he goes his way, for ever in search. In search of what?" (Baudelaire, 1863, Part III ¶ 1 – Part IV ¶ 1). And the *flâneur* becomes a detective.[89] Baudelaire was strongly influenced by American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), whom he described as "the most powerful pen of this age", and translated into French. He cites Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd" (Poe, 1840a), where "Sitting in a café, and looking through the shop window, a convalescent is enjoying the site of the passing crowd, and identifying himself in thought with all the thoughts that are moving around him. … In the end he rushes out into the crowd in search of a man unknown to him whose face, which he had caught sight of, had in a flash fascinated him (Baudelaire, 1863, Part III ¶ 5). But in the end, Poe decides that "perhaps it is one of the great mercies of God"

[87] Paul Auster described this as "to create a world around oneself by seeing as a stranger would" (Auster, 1982b, p. 39).
[88] When writing of De Quincey's poetic prose, Virginia Woolf could just as well have been describing the city poets, Baudelaire in particular: "To sit cheek by jowl with our fellows cramped up together is distasteful, indeed repulsive. But draw a little apart, see people in groups, as outlines, and they become at once memorable and full of beauty. Then it is not the actual sight or sound that matters, but the reverberations that it makes as it travels through our minds" (Woolf, 1962 p. 40).
[89] Benjamin examines this at length (Benjamin, 1938). He also observes that the detective story came into being (by Poe) at around the same time as photography (Benjamin, 1938, p. 48).

(and the city?) that this man of the crowd[90] "er lässt sich nicht lesen" (it does not permit itself to be read) (Poe, 1840a, p. 110).

On November 2 1974 beat poet Allen Ginsberg "… walked out of my red apartment door on East tenth street's dusk – / … . Walked past a taxicab controlling the bottle strewn curb – / past the young fellows with their umbrella handles & canes leaning against a ravaged Buick – / and as I looked at the crowd of kids on the stoop – a boy stepped up, put his arm around my neck / tenderly I thought for a moment, squeezed harder, his umbrella handle against my skull, / … as I went down shouting Om Ah Hum to gangs of lovers on the stoop watching … . / one boy felt my broken healed ankle, looking for hundred dollar bills behind my stocking weren't / even there – a third boy untied my Seiko Hong Kong watch rough from right wrist leaving a clasp – / prick skin tiny bruise / 'Shut up and we'll get out of here' – and so they left, / as I rose from the cardboard mattress thinking Om Ah Hum didn't stop em enough, / the tone of voice too loud – my shoulder bag with 10, 000 dollars full of poetry left on the broken / floor" (Ginsberg, 1975, p. 49-51).

Nineteenth century "sociological impressionist" (Frisby, 1981), Georg Simmel, remarked that "Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear" (Simmel, 1950, p. 486). Still, the city streets are a great place to eavesdrop. Charles Reznikoff, whose widow recalled of him that when he said "'I did not walk today,' he always conveyed an air of 'tragic loss'" (qtd. in Kazin, 1969[91]), wrote in "By the Well of Living and Seeing": "I was walking along Forty-Second Street as night was falling. / On the other side of the street was Bryant Park. / Walking behind me were two men / and I could hear some of their conversation: / 'What you must do,' one of them was saying to his companion, / 'is to decide on what you want to do / and then stick to it. Stick to it!' (Reznikoff, 1977, p. 131).

[90] Georg Simmel, who preceded and was a great influence on Walter Benjamin, described the stranger as the wanderer "not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the *potential* wanderer" (Simmel, 1903b, p. 402).
[91] An extract of the book is available online. I was unfortunately unable to find of copy of the book.

When Reznikoff was 80-years-old, Paul Auster met him for the first time. He said of him:

> I have met some good story-tellers in my life, but [he] was the champion. … What at first seemed to be an endless series of digressions, a kind of aimless wandering, turned out to be the elaborate and systematic construction of a circle. For example: why did you come back to New York after living in Hollywood? There followed a myriad of little incidents: meeting the brother of a certain man on a park bench, the color of someone's eyes, an economic crisis in some country. Fifteen minutes later, convinced that Reznikoff was lost, too- he would begin a slow return to his starting point. Then, with great clarity and conviction, he would announce: 'So that's why I left Hollywood.' In retrospect, it all made perfect sense. …
>
> There were also stories about his walks – in particular, his journey from New York to Cape Cod (on foot!), which he undertook when he was well past sixty. The important thing, he explained, was not to walk too fast. Only by forcing himself to keep to a pace of less than two miles per hour could he be sure to see everything he wanted to see. (Auster, 1996, ¶ 5-6)

"He walked, as much as anything, to get material," says Philip Lopate. But when it came to distilling the stories into poetry, "he felt no responsibility to give a full report of the walk; on returning home, he would focus on only that image or situation that had moved him. Many of his poems are miniature narratives, told in spare, plain language" (Lopate, 2004, section 3, ¶ 5).

City life requires a different kind of stamina from long walks, though, and having received less recognition than he deserved, "alongside the manifest tenderness in Reznikoff's work," says Lopate, "there was a preoccupation with cruelty, though the cruelty was often directed at himself"; as when "his stale solitude is not mitigated by any invigorating encounter" (Lopate, 2004, ¶ 7), and haunted by his own reflection, Reznikoff wrote: "I am alone – / and glad to be alone; / I do not like people who walk about / so late; who walk slowly after midnight / through the leaves fallen on sidewalks. / I do not like / my own face / in the little mirrors of the slot-machines / before the crowded stores" (Reznikoff, 1977, p. 26).

"What are the dangers of the forest and the prairie," wrote Baudelaire "compared with the daily shocks and conflicts of civilisation?" (Baudelaire, 1932, p. 415). From a distance, he wrote "To a Passer-by": "Graceful, noble, with a statue's form. / And I

drank, trembling as a madman thrills, / From her eyes, ashen sky where brooded storm, / The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills" (qtd. in Benjamin, 1938, p. 45).

The Mind

"A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world," wrote Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984 p. 2). I was struck by this when watching *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001), the film about schizophrenic mathematician, John Nash, and how he continued to walk to work every day.

There has long been a connection between walking and mental health; particularly depression, or melancholy, as it used to be called. Most notable amongst the writer-walkers, apart from Virginia Woolf, were the three German-language writers: Robert Walser (1878-1956) – Swiss, and contemporary of Franz Kafka (1883-1924); Walter Benjamin (1892-1940); and WG Sebald (1944-2001). Apart from their walking habits, and their melancholy, what they had in common was admiration for their work by the great European-literature-lover, Susan Sontag. The title of Sontag's essay on Benjamin, "Under the Sign of Saturn"[92] (which appears in her collection of the same name), could equally have been applied to Walser and Sebald.

In *Rings of Saturn*, Sebald's opus – which documents a walking tour through East Anglia in England (where he lived, and later died in a car accident[93]) and the

[92] Benjamin had written in "Agesilaus Santander": "I was born under the sign of Saturn – the planet of slow revolution, the star of hesitation and delays …" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 715).

[93] There have sadly been many tales of committed pedestrians being killed in accidents while travelling in cars. One of the most poignant stories is of Mildred Lisette Norman Ryder, the "Peace Pilgrim", who had set out in 1953, vowing "to remain a pilgrim until mankind had learned the ways of peace" (Peace Pilgrim, 1991, p. xiii). She walked over 25 000 miles, before she died tragically eleven days before her 73rd birthday, in a head-on collision on July 7 1981, when someone stopped to give her a lift. Following in her footsteps was Dutch-South African, Boudewijn Wegerif, who walked from Sweden to South Africa, to witness poverty first-hand and protest global debt. His journey is recorded in Kevin Harris's 1998 documentary, *The Long Walk Home*. Wegerif died of cancer in 2004.

accompanying stream of consciousness journey – the walk ends where the book begins, with the narrator unable to move, after being hospitalised for depression.[94] "The wandering that the prose does, both syntactically and in terms of subjects," says Michael Silverblatt, puts him in mind of De Quincey: "the need in a sense to almost sleepwalk, somnambulate, from one centre of attention to another, and a feeling in the reader that one has hallucinated the connection between the parts"[95] (Silverblatt, 2001, audio).

Robert Walser's walks are smaller in scale, most notably in his marvellous novella *The Walk*, which writer and urban policy advisor, Ken Worpole, noted in his review of Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust*, as her only visible omission from the 'canon of walking'.

In his story "The Street (1)" (1919), Walser writes:

> I wanted to speak with someone, but found no time … . In the midst of the unrelenting forward thrust I felt the wish to stand still. The muchness and the motion were too much and too fast. Everyone withdrew from everyone. There was a running, as of something liquefied, a constant going forth, as of evaporation. …
>
> As I was passing by, a woman's eyes spoke to me: 'Come with me. Quit the whirlpool, leave that farrago behind, join the only person who will make you

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In 1962, at the age of 26, Satish Kumar (founder and Director of Schumacher College for ecological studies in Devon) was inspired by Bertrand Russell's civil disobedience against the atomic bomb, and he and a friend decided to undertake an 8 000-mile, two-and-a-half year peace walk from Mahatma Ghandi's grave, in Delhi, to "the four corners of the nuclear world: Moscow, Paris, London and the USA". He wrote a letter to Russell, in which he said "I have decided to walk for peace, like you are". Russell wrote back: "Please walk fast, because I'm 90 years old and I want to meet you. I might die, so please walk fast." Kumar chronicles this journey in his book *No Destination* (Kumar, 2000). Ironically, "Gandhi, whose foot marches for social justice defined an era of Indian history, now has an expressway named for him. Its toll of $1.33 is more than about 300 million Indians earn in a day" (Waldman, 2005, December 5, ¶ 50).

[94] It has also been suggested that Sebald may have been suffering from "hypergraphia – the uncontrollable urge to write", which would account for his writing style, and his output. This is not a formally-recognised disorder, but has been examined by neurologist, Alice Weaver, in her book *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain*.

[95] Virginia Woolf has observed that "prose writer though he is, it is for his poetry that we read [De Quincey] and not for his prose" (Woolf, 1926, p. 32); the same might be said of Sebald. "Prose, Mr Binyon wrote the other day," Woolf continues, "'is a medium primarily addressed to the intelligence, poetry to feeling and imagination'. … There are in every age some writers who puzzle the critics, who refuse to go with the herd. They stand obstinately across the boundary lines, and do a greater service by enlarging and fertilizing and influencing than by their actual achievement, which, indeed, is often too eccentric to be satisfactory" (Woolf, 1926, pp. 32-34).

> strong. …' I wanted to follow her call, but was swept away in the stream. The street was just too irresistible.[96] (Walser, 2002, p. 127)

There is a photograph of an old man, lying in the snow; a hat lies above him, with footsteps leading from the top of the frame into the middle of the image, "his last steps in the slush" (Bachmann, 2002, ¶ 1). This is the picture taken by the police on Christmas day in 1956, when children stumbled upon the 78-year-old Walser's frozen body. He had not written since 1932, when he was institutionalised by his family for schizophrenia (probably a wrongful diagnosis), and declared: "I'm not here to write, I'm here to be mad" (Coetzee, 2000, ¶ 20). But he never stopped walking.

Apart from the efforts of Susan Sontag, who arranged for a collection of his stories to be republished by The New York Review of Books (Walser, 2002), he remains something of a well-kept secret in the English-speaking world. He is best known for his short pieces, and is said to have been a great influence on Kafka, who in his own short piece, "The spur-of-the-moment stroll", examines the positive effects of stepping out into the cold night, and discovering that "one has, after all, more ability than one has need easily to effect and endure the most rapid change … then for that evening one has stepped completely outside of one's family". And he realises: "The whole experience is enhanced when at that late hour one looks up a friend to see how he is" (Kafka, 1981, p. 22).

Virginia Woolf reaches similar conclusions in her essay "Street Haunting", when she goes out to buy a pencil: "The hour should be the evening and the season winter, for in winter the champagne brightness of the air and the sociability of the streets are grateful." Except her reasons for escape are her own company. "As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six," she continues, "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 own room. For there we sit surrounded by objects which perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience" (Woolf, 1930a, p. 19). And after all her encounters along the way, she realises: "to escape is the greatest

[96] This excerpt is reminiscent of Baudelaire's sonnet, "To a Passer-by", from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (qtd. in Benjamin, 1938, p. 45).

of pleasures; street haunting in winter the greatest of adventures. Still as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed. Here again is the usual door; here the chair turned as we left it and the china bowl and the brown ring on the carpet. And here – let us examine it tenderly, let us touch it with reverence – is the only spoil we have retrieved from all the treasures of the city, a lead pencil" (Woolf, 1930a, p. 29).

As Damon Galgut puts it, in his customarily succinct way: "some looking for a room, some trying to escape from the room they have" (Galgut, 2000, p. 18).

This paradox of leaving and returning is a constant refrain of the compulsive-walker; particularly the writer-walker. In the late fifteenth century, the poet Ficino wrote a book warning scholars and studious people, that because of their sedentary occupations, they could easily become severely depressed. He cautioned that they should find ways of managing the effects of being "Saturn's Child" (Moore, 1992, pp. 138-142).

Returning to Walser's literary influence, Benjamin was also very enamoured with him. In Benjamin's *Illuminations* (posthumously published in 1961), he described Walser's writing, with one of his customary aphorisms, as "quite aimless (and yet no less enchanting) linguistic savagery", and declared his tales to be "the product not of the nervous tension of the decadent, but of the pure and vibrant mood of the convalescent"[97] (Benjamin, 1999, p. 259). Sebald wrote critical essays about him (only available in German[98]), and Sontag described his walks as having "spent much of his life obsessively turning time into space" (Walser, 2002, viii). He was, she believed, "as delicate, as sly, as haunted" as Paul Klee. … "A cross between Stevie

[97] This echoes Poe's story, "The Man of the Crowd", in which the narrator "had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui* – moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision departs – achlus os prin epeen – and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its everyday condition" (Poe, 1840a, p. 103), and he proceeds to follow an old man that he spots through the glass of a London coffee-house. Some of Walser's stories contain similarly whimsical walks.

[98] This was confirmed by John Zilcosky, Associate Professor of German and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto (Zilcosky, 2005).

Smith and Beckett. … A truly wonderful, heartbreaking writer." And "we cannot help but see Walser as the missing link between Kleist and Kafka… . At the time it was more likely to be Kafka who was seen through the prism of Walser. Robert Musil, another admirer among Walser's contemporaries, when he first read Kafka pronounced the later 'a peculiar case of the Walser type'" (Walser, 2002, pp. vii-ix). And Herman Hesse said of Walser that "If he had a hundred thousand readers, the world would be a better place" (Walser, 2002, back cover). Benjamin speaks of Walser's "horror of success in life" (Sontag, 1980, p. 111), and Sontag says of Benjamin that "Robert Walser, for whom walking was the centre of his reclusive life and marvellous books, is a writer to whom one particularly wishes Benjamin had devoted a longer essay" (Sontag, 1980, p. 112).

Like Woolf, Benjamin had been taught to "revere mountains and forests – a photograph of him as a child shows him holding an alpenstock before some painted Alps" (Solnit, 2001, p. 197) – but he preferred the aloneness in the crowd of the city.[99] "Multitude, solitude: identical terms …" wrote Baudelaire in *Paris Spleen*[100] (Baudelaire, 1869b. p. 20). Benjamin's friend Gershom Scholem said of him: "I don't think I ever saw him walk with his head erect. His gait had something unmistakable

[99] On a lighter note, and a slight sidetrack, Tom Stoppard satirised the fashion of the "grand tours" in his play *Artist Descending a Staircase*, when Martello recalls the walk the three young friends took at the outbreak of World War I: "I said to my uncle, when they shot that absurd Archduke Ferdinand of Ruritania, Uncle! I said, does this mean war? – must I postpone the walking tour that I and my friends have been looking forward to since the winter? … Go and walk your socks off my Uncle said, and then take the waters at Baden-Baden, to which my auntie added, perhaps that will cure you of all that artistic nonsense with which you waste your time and an expensive education." Donner was bad-tempered. "You were dead keen about a walking tour, Mouse," Martello reprimands him. "Well, I like[d] some parts more than others," Donner responds. "The part I liked best was the first part when we planned our route, sitting by the fire at home with a cup of cocoa and a map of France. If you remember, we decided to make the journey in easy stages, between one charming village and the next … setting off each morning after a simple breakfast on a terrace overhung with vines, striking out cross-country along picturesque footpaths, occasionally fording a laughing brook, resting at midday in the shade, a picnic, perhaps a nap, and then another little walk to a convenient inn … a hot bath, a good dinner, a pipe in the tap room with the honest locals, and so to bed with a candle and a good book, to sleep dreamlessly – " But instead: "I'm bitten all day by French flies and at night the mosquitoes take over. I nearly drowned trying to cross a laughing torrent, the honest locals have stolen most of our money so that we have had to sleep rough for three days, I've had nothing to eat today except for half a coconut, and as for the picturesque footpaths – oh God, here they bloody come again," he says, indicating a convoy of lorries passing by (Stoppard, 1973, pp. 46-50).

[100] A number of the "prose poems" in *Paris Spleen* are said to have been influenced by Thomas De Quincey. "Who among us has not dreamt, in moments of ambition," wrote Baudelaire, "of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple and staccato enough to adapt to the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the undulations of dreams, and the sudden leaps of consciousness?" (qtd. in Benjamin, 1938b, p. 69). Virginia Woolf's observations quoted earlier, about De Quincey's poetic prose, echo Baudelaire's comments here.

about it, something pensive and tentative, which was probably due to shortsightedness" (Solnit, 2001, p. 198). As Benjamin puts it: "it was thirty years before the distinction between left and right had become visceral to me, and before I had acquired the art of reading a street map" (Benjamin, 1978, p. 4). Solnit imagines him walking the streets of Paris, "passing without noticing another exile with worse eyesight, James Joyce, who lived there from 1920 to 1940" (Solnit, 2001, p. 198). Sontag describes his as a "soft, daydreamer's gaze of the myopic" (Sontag, 1980, p. 109), but Benjamin himself called it stubbornness, developed when out walking with his mother as a child: "above all, a gaze that appears to see not a third of what it takes in" (Sontag, 1980, p. 114). Scholem said he seemed marked by "a profound sadness" (Sontag, 1980, p. 110). This state of melancholy had some benefits, though, and Benjamin declared that "nothing can overcome my patience" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 713).

There is talk of the *flâneurs*, around 1840,[101] taking turtles for walks in the Paris arcades. "The flâneurs liked to have the turtles set the pace for them," Benjamin wrote. "If they had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace"[102] (Benjamin, 1938, p. 54). But Solnit is quick to point out that "No one has named an individual who took a tortoise on a walk, and all who refer to this practice use Benjamin as their source" (Solnit, 2001, p. 200), so we have only his word to go on.

Poet Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), on the other hand, was witnessed taking a lobster for a walk, but this was for reasons other than speed. "Why should a lobster be any more ridiculous than a dog?" he demanded. "Or a cat, or a gazelle, or a lion, or any

[101] This was the year Poe wrote his story "The Man of the Crowd" (Poe, 1840a).
[102] Robert Louis Stevenson, in his essay, "Walking Tours", declares that he who walks too fast will "come to his inn, at night, with a sort of frost on his five wits and a starless night of darkness in his spirit. Not for him the mild luminous evening of the temperate walker! He has nothing left of man but a physical need for bedtime and a double nightcap; and even his pipe, if he be a smoker, will be savourless and disenchanted. It is the fate of such an one to take twice as much trouble as is needed to obtain happiness, and miss the happiness in the end; he is the man of the proverb, in short, who goes further and fares worse" (Stevenson, 1876, ¶ 1).

By the end of the nineteenth century mechanical engineer Frederick Taylor, according to Benjamin, proclaimed: "Down with dawdling!" (Benjamin, 1938a, p. 54), and "used a stopwatch and a slide rule to work out how long every single task should take to the nearest fraction of a second" (Honoré, 2004, p. 28). Since then most of us have behaved as if he "were hovering nearby, checking his stop-watch and tut-tutting over his clipboard" (p. 280).

other animal that one chooses to take for a walk? I have a liking for lobsters. They are peaceful, serious creatures. They know the secrets of the sea, they don't bark, and they don't gnaw upon one's *monadic* privacy like dogs do. And Goethe had an aversion to dogs, and he wasn't mad" (Holmes, 1986, p. 213).

For Sebald, the crowd in the city seemed to hold little fascination. For him it was tramping through the countryside, and the ghosts of those who had gone before, accompanied by the libraries of his mind, that drove him. Throughout his novel, *Austerlitz*, the concentration camp is the "invisible referent" (as Michael Silverblatt put it) "left out, but always gestured towards" (Silverblatt, 2001, audio). Sebald explained simply, quoting Benjamin: "There is no point in exaggerating that which is already horrific." [103]

"As you walk along, you find things, said Sebald. "I think that's the advantage of walking. It's just one of the reasons I do that a lot. You find things by the wayside or you buy a brochure written by a local historian which is in a tiny little museum somewhere, and which you would never find in London. And in that you find odd details that lead you somewhere else … in the same way in which, say, a dog runs through a field. If you look at a dog following the advice of his nose, he traverses a patch of land in a completely unplottable manner. And he invariably finds what he is looking for. … So you then have a small amount of material and you accumulate things, and it grows, and one thing takes you to another, and you make something out of these haphazardly assembled materials. And, as they have been assembled in this random fashion, you have to strain your imagination in order to create a connection between the two things" (Cuomo, 2001, question 1).

Debate often arises as to whether the characters in his 'fictions' are real, or whether the narrator is in fact himself. We could probably conclude that they are composites of real stories he has heard, and contain aspects of himself. "I like to listen to people who have been sidelined in one way or another," he said, referring to the "conspiracy of silence" after World War II. There is "some sort of emptiness somewhere that needs to be filled by accounts from witnesses one can trust. I would never have

[103] I have not been able to locate the source of this quote of Benjamin's; it is likely that Sebald was paraphrasing.

encountered these witnesses if I hadn't left my native country at the age of twenty, because the people who could tell you the truth, or something at least approximating the truth, did not exist in their country any longer, but one could find them in Manchester and in Leeds or in North London or in Paris, Belgium …" (Silverblatt, 2001, audio). Places are as much characters in his books as people are; some more melancholy than others.[104] "If there can be a moment like an epiphany," he said, "it can be achieved only by actually going to certain places, and exposing oneself to these places" (Silverblatt, 2001, audio).

On the subject of the tone of his writing, which Silverblatt describes as "pastoral philosophy … characterised by tenderness, bewilderment, horror, pity, self-mortification … [with] tenderness brought to bear on subjects that have usually compelled indignation, scorn, and huge and glittering contempt", Sebald replied: "In order to get the full measure of the horrific, one needs to remind the reader of beatific moments in life; it requires that contrast. Old-fashionedness of the diction, or of the narrative tone, is therefore nothing to do with nostalgia for a better age that's gone past, but it is simply something that, as it were, heightens the awareness of that which we have managed to engineer in this century" (Silverblatt, 2001, audio).

Paul Auster, too, speaks of the need to immerse oneself in a place, in order to acquaint oneself with the ghosts of the past.

> All during the three days he spent in Amsterdam, he was lost. The plan of the city is circular (a series of concentric circles, bisected by canals, a cross-hatch of hundreds of tiny bridges, each one connecting to another, as though endlessly), and you cannot simply "follow" a street as you can in other cities. To get somewhere you have to know in advance where you are going. A. did not, since he was a stranger, and moreover found himself curiously reluctant to consult a map. For three days it rained, and for three days he walked around in circles. He realised that in comparison to New York (or New Amsterdam, as he was fond of saying to himself after he returned), Amsterdam was a small place, a city whose streets could probably be memorised in ten days. … He wandered. He walked around in circles. He allowed himself to be lost. Sometimes, he later discovered, he would be only a few feet from his destination, but not knowing where to turn, would then go off in the wrong direction, thereby taking himself farther from where he thought he was going.

[104] Most remarkable, in *Rings of Saturn*, is his description of the effects of colonisation on the Belgians in their own country, which he describes as apparently soulless and spiritually barren.

> Cut off from everything that was familiar to him, unable to discover even a single point of reference, he saw that his steps, by taking him nowhere, were taking him nowhere but into himself. He was wandering inside himself, and he was lost. Far from troubling him, this state of being lost became a source of happiness, of exhilaration. He breathed it into his very bones. As if on the brink of some previously hidden knowledge, he breathed it into his very bones and said to himself, almost triumphantly: "I am lost."

But when he does finally reach his destination, he feels differently:

> It was a Sunday morning, gray with rain, and the streets along the canal were deserted. He climbed the steep and narrow staircase inside the house and entered the secret annex. As he stood in Anne Frank's room, the room in which the diary was written, now bare, with the faded pictures of Hollywood movie stars she had collected still pasted to the walls, he suddenly found himself crying. Not sobbing, as might happen in response to a deep inner pain, but crying without sound, the tears streaming down his cheeks, as if purely in response to the world. …
>
> From the window of that room, facing out on the backyard, you can see the rear windows of a house in which Descartes once lived. There are children's swings in the yard now, toys scattered in the grass, pretty little flowers. As he looked out the window that day, he wondered if the children those toys belonged to had any idea of what had happened thirty-five years earlier in the spot where he was standing. And if they did, what it would be like to grow up in the shadow of Anne Frank's room. (Auster, 1982a, pp. 82-87)

The three German writers, Walser, Benjamin and Sebald, were always in the shadow of the Nazis. Walser wrote: "I stopped writing in Herisau. Why should I continue to write? The Nazis have destroyed my world: The newspapers I used to write for have folded, their editors have been chased away or have died. I'm pretty close to being a fossil" (Bachmann, 2002, ¶ 1). And Benjamin, fearing being interned in a concentration camp when he was about to be sent back to France during the invasion, while attempting to cross the Spanish border, took an overdose of morphine.[105] Virginia Woolf, too, having lived through the first world war, was overwhelmed with dread during the second. On June 8 1940, she wrote: "Shall I ever finish these notes –

[105] There is a theory that Benjamin was murdered by Stalinists, which has been referred to variously as far-fetched and daring. Edward Rothstein, of the *New York Times*, observed of the author of the *Weekly Standard* article: "But Mr. Schwartz, in the interview, said he was 'just asking questions that should be asked.' By shifting the emphasis away from the martyrdom of suicide and more toward the internecine political battles on the Communist left, Mr. Schwartz's essay directs attention to the political ambiguities of Benjamin's work, particularly its mercurial and idiosyncratic relationship to Communism. … Even if Mr. Schwartz's speculations prove to be untenable, these are questions worth considering. At the very least, it is worth scrutinizing Benjamin's late writings, 'blasting' them (as he might have put it) out of their received context, to see whether, among the shards, something different might be found" (Rothstein, 2001, ¶ 8-12). See Schartz 2001.

let alone make a book of them? The battle is at its crisis; every night the Germans fly over England; it comes closer to this house daily. If we are beaten then – however we solve that problem, and one solution is suicide (so it was decided three nights ago in London among us) – book writing becomes doubtful. But I wish to go on, not to settle down in that dismal puddle" (Woolf, 1976, p. 100). Sadly, on March 28 1941, she filled her pockets with stones, and took her last walk, into the River Ouse near her home in Sussex.

While these four may have been born "under the sign of Saturn", and been depressed at the outset, there is no underestimating the effects that finding themselves on either side of the goose-stepping of war had on their psyches, and which walking relieved for brief moments.

Although only overtly addressed in the piece on David Bruce, walking for the management of mental health is a theme that runs through my collection of pieces: from Phaswane's history of having considered suicide ("If I couldn't walk I'd be sick," he told me); to Sue's "I can usually walk the fear off"; to my own need to escape the ghosts in my room.[106]

The question is often asked why a disproportionate number of writers and creative people suffer from depression. Psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison, herself a manic-depressive, concludes in her book *Touched With Fire*, that it is often the manic phase on the bipolar spectrum that allows them to produce the work they do (Jamison, 1993). But during the depressive phase, as David Bruce told me, "I couldn't get on my knees to pray". This is supported by William Styron in *Darkness Visible* (Styron, 1990).

Walking in the streets of Johannesburg, where safety is often in question, has an added twist. Much like an abusive parent, on whom a child continues to depend, the streets can be unpredictable, and often a *source* of stress, added to the anxiety which

[106] Michael Ventura elaborates on what he refers to as "the talent of the room. Unless you have that, your other talents are worthless," he believes, as "Writing is something you do alone in a room" (Ventura, 1993, ¶ 2-3).

one is trying to escape. There are often ghosts of the living, experienced in violent encounters, that haunt our walks.[107]

The Reader

In thinking about who I was writing this book for, I realised that I conceived of it as a travel guide of sorts. Apart from wanting to provide a collection of entertaining stories, I aimed to provide – in a country where, apart from by those who have no option, it is thought to be too dangerous to walk in the streets – a resource, for tentative and foolhardy pedestrians alike. It seems impossible (and perhaps irresponsible) not to include violence in any examination of South African society, and this is one of the themes that runs through all of the stories; though it should be stressed that not all of the interviewees had experienced incidences of violence.

The murder of Daryl Kempster, the *Lord of the Dance* crew member who was shot on the steps of the Parktonian Hotel in Braamfontein in June 2004, because "he had been stubborn and had refused to give [his assailant] his laptop"[108] (Mkhwanazi, 2005, ¶ 1), was shocking – for a number of reasons. Apart from the violent and senseless killing, it is a story that paints a particular kind of picture of South Africa (along with books like Coetzee's *Disgrace*), and appears to be *the* South African story, when it is only *a* South African story.

All of the cast and crew of the production were offered security and escort by the theatre for the 100 metres to their hotel (Flatley, 2004). Why did Kempster decline, and insist on walking alone through the streets of the inner city in the early hours of a Sunday morning, carrying a bag and a laptop computer? Did he think the warnings were hysterical? Did he think himself invincible? After the murder, the cast and crew

[107] See more on the "Ghosts of the living and dead alike [that] haunt the places of our lives" (p. 813) in Bell, Michael M. (1997, December). "The Ghosts of Place", Theory and Society. Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 813-836.

[108] It was testified by "state witness Matshepo Thloloe at the start of the trial in the Johannesburg High Court" on October 17, 2005 that suspect Jabulani Moyo "had bragged about" this (Mkhwanazi, October 18, 2005, ¶ 1-2). Though on October 31 Moyo was found not guilty by Judge Phillipa Kruger, as she "could not say beyond reasonable doubt that Moyo did rob and kill Darryl Kempster … . She said there was a discrepancy between the identity kit police drew up and Moyo's physical appearance" (Sapa, October 31, ¶ 3-4).

then relocated "to a smart hotel in the prosperous Sandton financial district" (Reuters, 2004, ¶ 7), before leaving the country as soon as possible.

At the other end of the spectrum are those locals who will not walk further than from their front door to their car, before driving out from behind their security gates, fleeing "from safety to safety with nowhere in between" (van Niekerk, 1999[109]).

What I aimed to show in the book is that, yes, Johannesburg (and even Cape Town) can be dangerous to walk in, particularly at certain times of the day, and in certain areas, and under certain circumstances. But people (and not just the indigent) *are* still walking. And ironically, the fewer people there are on the streets, the more chance there is of being a target (as was shown with the Washington DC sniper attacks). Conversely, the more populated our streets are, by a diverse cross-section of citizens, the more sense of community and safety we will have.[110] By presenting a range of stories and experiences, of those who are making the choice to walk, I hoped to illustrate to travellers (local and foreign) that it can be done, but there are risks to be avoided, without locking ourselves away permanently behind high security walls.

Beyond that, I aimed to situate the stories within a global context, within the autocentricity that feeds our oil wars,[111] making the book relevant to an international reader. But having said all of that, mainly I aimed to write a book that is interesting and entertaining, about something that most of us simply take for granted. In an interview, Rebecca Solnit said that one of the pleasures of publishing her book, *Wanderlust*, had been all the people who had "come forth to tell" their walking stories (Lydon, 2000, audio). I wanted to pick up where she left off, and record some of the individual stories.

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[109] There are no page numbers in this publication.

[110] This was illustrated vividly after the recent bombings in London when the entire work-force of that city walked home at the end of the day. "It was the weirdest thing, no traffic on the streets but the pavements crowded with commuters walking the long walk home," a friend wrote. "It changed the energy of London completely. It was quite calm and quiet without the traffic, and the streets were for walking. Quite nice really. I discovered a few interesting streets and buildings I had never seen from the bus on my way home as well" (Vienings, 2005).

[111] Frighteningly, interviewer Amanda Griscom Little posed this question to peak oil fundi Matthew Simmons: "It boggles my mind that data on oil reserves can be concealed. Knowing when we're going to run out would seem as critical to global security as knowing who has weapons of mass destruction. Why isn't disclosing oil data a responsibility on par with disclosing WMDs?" (Griscom Little, November 3, 2005, question 12).

As someone once said, people tell you to write what you know, but it makes more sense to "write what you want to know". For me it was a combination of the two, to answer Kundera's question: "where have they gone, the amblers of yesteryear?" (Kundera, 1996, p. 4).

The Publisher

While simply getting a book published can be a challenge, there are also a range of factors to consider with regard to where and how to go about seeking publication, which I have given a fair amount of thought to. There is currently a boom in South African publishing, and it would be nice to aim to be published locally; to support the local publishing industry, and to be visibly part of the South African writing community. On the other hand, where the local industry seems to be lacking, is in the area of distribution: particularly with regard to distributing South African books internationally. As an example, Ivan Vladislavić's work has been translated into French, German, Dutch and Croatian, but it is almost impossible to obtain his books in England and America; not even via Amazon.[112]

In a conversation with Maggie Davey, Publishing Director of Jacana Media (who to my mind is producing some of the best recent work: including, amongst others, *I Remember King Kong* and *The Silent Minaret*), she confirmed that their books are only available "in the UK from the Africa Book Centre in Covent Garden – they hold stock. And in the US, IPG (ipgbooks.com)",[113] or from Jacana's website; once again, they are not available from Amazon. In other words, you need to be really committed, if you are outside South Africa, and want to read these books.

By contrast, while a book like Don Waldie's collection of essays on Los Angeles: *Where We Are Now*, published by the small Angel City Press in LA, is relatively obscure, I was able to discover it via Google, and purchase it very easily from

[112] I have recommended both *The Restless Supermarket* and *The Exploded View* to friends in London, Los Angeles and New York, and they have been unable to find them.
[113] Personal communication from Maggie Davey, 15 April 2004.

Amazon. So the choice seems to be between publishing locally, and having one's work available only locally, or publishing outside of South Africa, not supporting the local publishing industry (or being part of the South African writing community), but having one's work available internationally, if only electronically.

There is one other crucial factor in the equation, however: publishing internationally depends on securing an agent, which can be very difficult. So these are all factors which I will need to address, when the book is finally complete, and ready to submit for publication.

Conclusion

In July 2002, there was a report in the *Sunday Times*, of twice the number of registered vehicles on South African roads as in 1994. This may to some extent reflect that more vehicles are simply being registered than previously, but there is no doubt that, globally, traffic is mushrooming to unsustainable levels. Gridlock and road rage are on the increase,[114] and 'one person one car' is definitely not an option.[115] Since British housewife Bridget Driscoll was the first person to be hit and killed by a car, in London in 1896, "annual traffic fatalities now stand at 1.3 million worldwide, more than double the figure for 1990"[116] (Honoré, 2004, p. 8). The car that hit Driscoll was travelling at what witnesses described as "a reckless pace, in fact, like a fire engine"

[114] In August 2005 South African motorists were top of "the list in a study of road rage over 12 months in 10 countries" (Sapa, 2005, ¶ 1).
[115] Between Northern Virginia and Washington DC, an innovative system has developed. Much like South Africa's minibus taxi industry, fuelled by a need, "slugging" (as it is known) started by "spontaneous eruption". A sophisticated combination of carpooling and hitchhiking, it allows solo drivers to pick up strangers, and thereby qualify to drive in high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. There is no charge, but – like SA's minibus industry – there is an unwritten code of behaviour: "When you get in the car, you don't converse with the driver … Only the driver can initiate a conversation. You're basically a body in the car. You're not to talk on a cellphone or with other people in the car. Slugs must not smoke, eat, fiddle with the radio, windows or air-conditioning or, if they are invited to talk, say anything at all about religion or politics" (Kilborn, 2003). About 10 000 commuters from Northern Virginia travel this way. While it reduces the number of vehicles on the road, which is an unquestionably good thing, the irony of the system is that it is geared to speed. Being able to use the HOV lanes enables commuters to reach their destinations in a quarter of the time they would normally.
[116] The Coroner at Mrs Driscoll's inquest, William Percy Morrison, "was the first to apply the term 'accident' to violence caused by speed", and said he hoped "such a thing would never happen again" (Cardiff Council Road Safety, n.d., ¶ 3).

(Cardiff Council Road Safety, n.d.) – the vehicle was unable to travel at more than 4.5 miles per hour (Honoré, 2004, p. 100).

In seeking out these pedestrian tales, however, my aim has not been an anti-car lobby. Apart from in science fiction, there is no chance of turning back the clock on technological development, nor should we. My argument, rather, is for developing consciousness about slowing down. As Gary Carter put it, "Speed is the great lie we tell ourselves"; and tortoise wins the race.[117]

Professor Tim Couzens once said that if you're writing about something, you should talk about it, because "people will tell you things".[118] That has certainly been the case with this project, where people have seemed only too happy to discuss their pedestrian habits, which they find generally regarded as aberrant and ludicrous. But in addition, invariably they have said, "Oh you must speak to so-and-so!"[119]

"Take your body where it has never been before" was the slogan of the Health and Racquet Club; 'the gym', that in a city like Johannesburg, of "fast money and still faster guns", is a landmark in that "flight from safety to safety with nowhere in between" (van Niekerk, 1999). Taking our bodies where they have never been before, might simply mean becoming a tourist in one's own land, and walking that "nowhere" of our city streets. "Tourism itself," writes Rebecca Solnit, "is one of the last major outposts of walking. … To satisfy curiosity you must be willing to seem naïve, to engage, to explore, to stare and be stared at, and people nowadays seem more willing or able to enter that state elsewhere than at home" (Solnit, 2001, p. 281). Solnit concludes her history of walking with a question mark on whether that history has a future, and will continue to be written on our streets (Solnit, 2001, p. 291).

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[117] If foreign affairs journalist, Carl Honoré's, recent book *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed* (published in Canada as *In Praise of Slow*) is anything to go on, it would seem that the new "Slow Movement" is gaining popularity. For Honoré personally, though, ironically it would seem that nothing much has changed. He writes on his website: "The last few months have been a bit of a blur. *In Praise of Slow* seemed to touch a nerve around the world. Since it came out in spring 2004, my life has turned into a whirlwind of interviews, lectures and international tours. I dash around telling everyone how wonderful it is to slow down." See http://www.inpraiseofslow.com/

[118] He said this during a travel writing class in the second half of 2002.

[119] The research process was much the same, with one writer on walking mentioning another, opening onto new paths and characters. In the end I had to leave many paths merely signposted but not entered.

Christopher Morley wrote in 1917, that "the motors have done this for us … walking will remain the mystic and private pleasure for the secret and humble few"[120] (Morley, 1917, ¶ 23). But thankfully, it seems, there remains a rich subculture of Kundera's "amblers of yesteryear" (Kundera, 1996, p. 4), still "curious in the world" (Pepys, 1663, p. 106[121]), "zealous to sate himself with a thousand quaintnesses" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 4), and anxious to remain in contact with others. And "sometimes it seems," wrote Morley, "as though literature were a co-product of legs and head" (Morley, 1917, ¶ 11), what Jean-Christophe Bailly has since described as "a generative grammar of the legs" (qtd. in Worpole, 2001, November, ¶ 15). So if, in Michel de Certeau's terms, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 97), to stop walking is to be silenced.

Perhaps, in the final analysis, writer on urban and social policy, Ken Worpole, put it best, when he said: "where there are feet, there's hope" (Worpole, 2001 November, ¶ 12).

[120] This was the year that Robert Walser wrote his novella, "The Walk".
[121] Pepys was referring to his "country cousin", the bailiff of his land, when on 30 April 1663 he wrote in his diary: "Lord! what a stir Stankes makes with his being crowded in the streets and wearied in walking in London, and would not be wooed by my wife and Ashwell to go to a play, nor to White Hall, or to see the lyons, though he was carried in a coach. I never could have thought there had been upon earth a man so little curious in the world as he is."

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