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# Stories from the Walking Library

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## Abstract

From August 17 to September 17, 2012, Deirdre Heddon and Misha Myers created and carried a Walking Library, made for the Sideways Arts Festival. Sideways, an art festival 'in the open' and 'on the go', aimed to connect ecology and culture through using the 'slow ways' or 'slow paths' of Flanders. The Walking Library was comprised of more than 90 books suggested as books 'good to take for a walk' and functioned as a mobile library for Sideways' artists and public participants. In addition to carrying a curated stock, the Library offered a peripatetic reading and writing group. Drawing on the Library's resources and the experience of reading, writing and walking one's way across Belgium, Heddon and Myers consider how reading in situ affects the experience of the journey and the experience of walking; how journeying affects the experience of reading; how reading affects the experience of writing; and how a walk, as a space of knowledge production, is written and read.

## Keywords

books, libraries, mobile methods, reading, walking, writing

## Prologue

In 1794, fellow Cambridge undergraduates Joseph Hucks and Samuel Taylor Coleridge walked to North Wales. Hucks carried with him the poems of Thomas Churchyard.

In 1802, Coleridge walked through Cumberland, carrying a book of German poetry wrapped in green oilskin. He apparently read the Book of Revelations in Buttermere.

In 1818, poet John Keats walked to the Lake District and Scotland with his friend Charles Brown. Keats carried Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Brown the works of John Milton.

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In 1867, on a thousand mile walk to the gulf, conservationist John Muir carried a copy of Robert Burns' poetry, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, William Wood's *Botany*, a small New Testament, a journal and a map.

In 2012, Misha Myers and Dee Heddon walked across Belgium, carrying Charles Dickens' *Night Walks* (1861), Rebecca Solnit's *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006), W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005)...

## Introduction

Claims made for relations between walking and writing are multiple and intertwined, ranging from walking's rhythms assisting in the task of poetic composition, to the repetitive and hypnotic foot-fall providing a track for contemplation, to the close-at-foot and ever changing environment offering rich resource for inspiration and embodied knowing, to the act of walking itself prompting writing about walking.

Whilst much has been written about walking, including about walking and writing, the history of walking as a cultural practice also reveals the carrying of reading materials by walkers as commonplace, at least from the Romantic period onwards. Repeated references to books taken on walks prompts one to wonder whether books are carried today or, relatedly, what books would be good to take on a walk? We decided to pose this question to gather suggestions for books to accompany a 334 km walk across Belgium, travelling from the west to the east, as part of the Sideways Festival (August 17 to September 17, 2012). Sideways, an art festival "in the open" and "on the go", aimed to connect ecology and culture through using the 'slow ways' or 'slow paths' of Flanders – a network of footpaths, alleys, tracks, backroads and 'desire lines' or 'olifantenpadjes' ('elephant paths') – that offer alternatives to Belgium's dense and expanding road networks.<sup>1</sup>

Soliciting many recommendations, we purchased about 90 titles for our Walking Library, an amount that fitted both our budget and the four rucksacks that were literally taken on a walk across Belgium, carried by four volunteer librarians at a time. In addition to carrying books good to take for a walk, the Walking Library, like all good libraries, offered extension activities: facilitating peripatetic writing workshops and giving readings along the journey. The library expanded with both the collective book of the journey written in workshops and through collected book donations and catalogued suggestions.

Walking with a library of books, we wondered what these literary companions added to the journey; how reading in situ affected the experience of the journey and the experience of walking; how journeying affected the experience of reading; and how reading affected the experience of writing. Our writing about the Walking Library excursion, here, engages these questions at the same time as it raises others: how is a walk, as a space of knowledge production, written and read? Such questions are prompted by the 'Excursions: telling stories and journeys' conference, held in Glasgow in 2012, the imbrication of storying and journeying implicit in our library's composition, but also in the compositions we compose during and after our walking (this one included).<sup>2</sup> Our narrative draws upon various archival materials: book cards, card catalogue, reading log, SMS and email messages, reading and writing session notebooks and the coauthors' field diaries. Mainly it interweaves between the coauthors' autobiographical reflections, but also draws upon the voices of the volunteer Walking Librarians (see Figure 1), the book donors who also donate their stories, and those who join the reading and writing group, writing their own thoughts, impressions and stories. Employing a research methodology on the move,<sup>3</sup> our aim here is not to work our way towards – or up – to vertically integrated knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Following anthropologist Tim Ingold, we recognize ourselves and our fellow walkers on this journey as wayfinders, knowing as we go. In place of

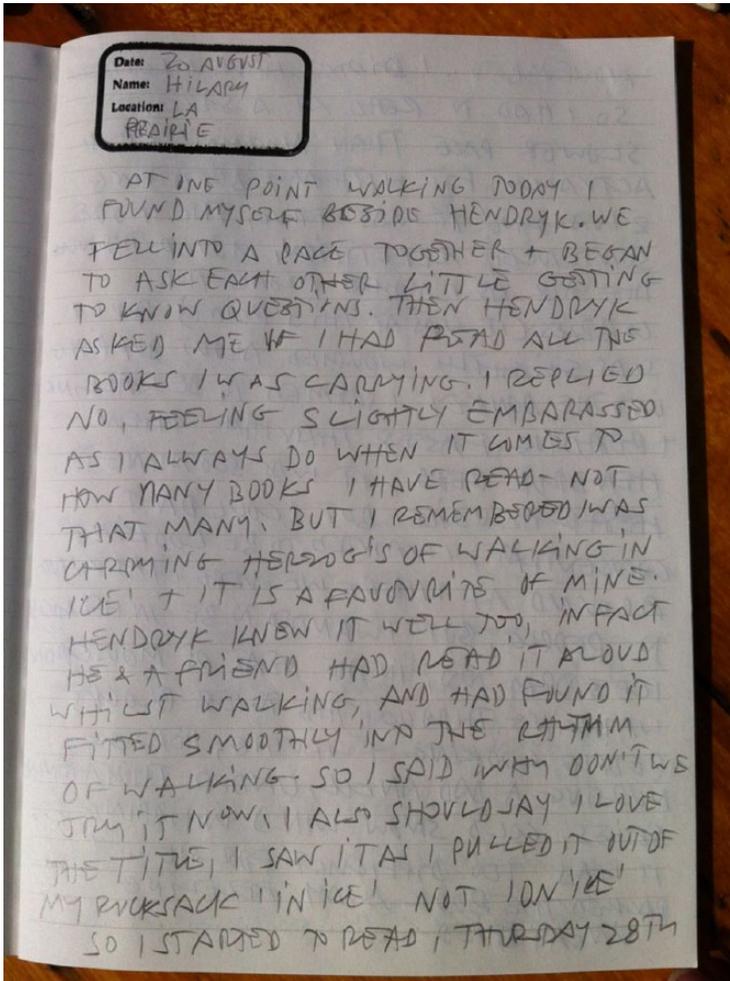


Figure 1. Page from Walking Library notebook.

'factual' data and classifications, therefore, we offer stories – 'occurrences' or topics that are knots in the complex and always-in-process meshworks constructed as we move *along* them.<sup>5</sup>

Reenacting here the discursive space created by the Walking Library, we also aim to subvert the traditional structure of the journey narrative or travelogue told from a singular, objective point-of-view. Our multi-perspectival and sensorial account focuses on episodes happening within a longer and wider context of the journey through more social, and perhaps emotional, modes of telling. Similar to geographer Hayden Lorimer's 'mobile' and 'multi-sensory biographies' or 'small stories', our account considers the interplay of embodied experiences and social relations involved in walking and in the production of knowledge through drawing on a range of sources that reveal haptic, sonic and kinaesthetic forms of experience,<sup>6</sup> shuttling between 'scales of enquiry' that range from the institutional to the intimate.<sup>7</sup> Attention is given to the embodied action and social relations involved in the walk, with the peripatetic in the Walking Library significant not as a mode of transport, but more as a mode of attention with bodies themselves becoming meaningful as '*fielding* places'.<sup>8</sup>

The multiple bodies in this research are placed in relation, not only to place, but to text. In our account we attempt to read and write the materiality of walking, resisting the tendency literary critic Anne Wallace has noted in traditional readings of the peripatetic in 19th-century literature where it is treated as an arbitrary or inessential mode of travel – an in-between proper destinations.<sup>9</sup> Our narrative of the Walking Library excursion reveals both the continuing influence of the Romantic discourse of walking and its disruption. Our stories veer towards ideas of walking as sensual, liberating, wholesome and cultivating (of thoughts and relations), arduous but rewarding, undifferentiated and universal. In the face of such reiterative practice, Wallace's critique of discourses about writing and walking resonates: '... [it is as if] walking precedes writing, generates text, while text appears to generate nothing at all, certainly not ideas about the walking it represents.'<sup>10</sup> Wallace's pertinent point is that walking is as much narrativized and metaphorical text as it is real, physical action. As our library of books becomes increasingly diverse, so too do the pathways available to us, offering alternatives to Romantic notions perpetuated through and in many of the initial books that accompany us. Moreover, in the live enactment of our Walking Library these pathways are never singularly textual, emerging as they do with walkers' autobiographies and the social relations and interactions activated by the very process of walking. The paths of our story and the one we walk are formed from the rhythms and paces of the surrounding landscape and walking companions, their 'texts' offering different accounts for the breaking of different trails than those encountered in the Romantic imagination.

## **Walking, writing, reading/walking, reading, writing/reading, walking, writing**

*18 August 2012, Lotegat Bunkhouse, nr Menen*

Our collection of books, transported to Belgium in suitcases, is unpacked and lined up on a windowsill in the bunkhouse where we are making final preparations for our long walk. Along with books we have carried library cards, card pockets, a card catalogue box and a date stamp. With these archival accoutrements our collection is transformed into a library.

The story of public libraries is firmly modern; a discourse of liberation through knowledge enabled by the provision of space and materials to facilitate self-education towards good citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Such embrace of free and equal access to informational resource is tempered in the library's emergence as part of modernity's increasingly bureaucratic and technologized systems, its purpose to organize and control knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Our initial haul of books for the Walking Library has been categorized by a professional librarian from Falmouth University, each book provided with a performative, 'no-nonsense' Dewey Decimalized sticker. Dewey's system remains the most recognized classification technique in the world, with books authoritatively divided into 10 classes, classes into nine divisions, and divisions into nine sections.<sup>13</sup> This is a vertical taxonomy. Whilst Dewey's categories are far from random, the neatness signals artifice.<sup>14</sup> Such artistry at the heart of the *techne* is felt by librarian Louis Stanley Jast, who in 1892 proclaims feeling enlivened by his awareness that librarianship is as much an art as a science.<sup>15</sup>

As we begin the laborious process of attaching stickers to book spines (less a science or art than a task), we agonize over what numbers to attach to last minute finds – revealing a tension between our choice to activate our library as a performative space, one dependent on our *performance* as librarians, and our discomfort at the straight-jacketing certainties of bureaucratic, ideological knowledge-organization. Growing into our roles as amateur librarians, we also begin to question the existing categorizations: German film-maker Werner Herzog's diaristic

account of his walk across Germany to France in the winter of 1974, *Of Walking in Ice*, sits securely in 'History', whilst populist historian Morris Marples' *Shanks' Pony* (1958), a history of walking, has been classified as 'Fine Arts'. The content of our library, presumably like all libraries, is unruly when it comes to categories – an unruliness to be harnessed through the playfulness of the Walking Library.

The generative tension between science and play, or playing at science – with libraries' techniques supported by multiple props and ritualized performances – makes the library a site ripe for artistic appropriation.<sup>16</sup> Our library enterprise makes use of the cast off and outmoded analogue tools (book pockets, paper-based card catalogue, date stamps, etc.) no longer needed with the move towards digitization (and we admit that nostalgia might well be at play here too – along with a concern about the status of/threat to the existence of public libraries). Our performance joins that of The Bristol Art Library created by Annabel Other, and the Itinerant Poetry Librarian. Like them, we expand and subvert the structures of library technologies – rules, regulations, policies, bye laws and practices.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, we also restate the 19th-century commitment to free access to knowledge enshrined in public libraries.

With our stock now displayed in the bunkhouse, our fellow artists browse the collection. Invisible are those we decided not to purchase, including Kate Atkinson's collection of short stories, *Not the End of the World* (2002),<sup>18</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novel, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), Orhan Pamuck's novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), and Barry Pilton's personal account, *One Man and His Bog* (1986).<sup>19</sup> Looking along our improvised library shelf, there is not much that is lighthearted, and little by way of fiction.

The books we selected for our library offer up a taxonomic logic separate to that of Dewey's: i) walking as a genre of literature – e.g. Bruce Chatwin's autobiographical work, *Songlines* (1986); ii) the cultural context of *this* walk – e.g. Tom Butcher's account of his retracing of explorer H. M. Stanley's famous 1874 journey through the Congo, *Blood River* (2005); iii) the physical and emotional demands made by long-distance walking in company – e.g. Apsley Cherry-Garrard's memoir of Captain Scott's expedition to the South Pole, *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922) – a sizeable tome of some weight; iv) 'practical' books for our walk – e.g. *Baedeker's Guide to Belgium* (2008); and, (v) books that, like the festival itself, dwell on different – and implicitly better – ways that humans might dwell on earth – e.g. cultural ecologist David Abram's *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (2010).

The story suggested by our Walking Library collection might be one of edification, the answer to 'What book is good to take for a walk?' being 'One that is self-improving for the reader'. There is also, at the outset, a noticeable absence of Flemish books though our intention is to address this by gathering donations as we walk across Belgium. The owners of the bunkhouse become our first public donors, gifting to our library Flemish author Hugo Claus' classic play *Vrijdag* (1969). Collecting further donations from people met along the way, and never refusing anything offered, our library becomes less curated and more diverse, the librarian performing as catalyst rather than bureaucrat. (see Figure 2) The content of our library archives connections made, those stories adding to the ones written across the thousands of pages we carry on our backs.

### *19 August 2012, Cultural Centre De Steiger, Menen*

Today is the first day of Sideways and it involves more moving in circles than walking. We are at the first of five festival hubs, interspersed along the journey as resting points between walking. An ingenious fold out truck transforms into a pop-up café bar, a vintage caravan becomes a DJ booth, and a wooden gypsy caravan a stage for storytellers. Amongst these temporary edifices of the



**Figure 2.** Donors of the Walking Library bring new stories to the collection.

itinerant village that will follow us to each node is our Walking Library. The community wouldn't be complete without its own library.

We install the books for the public to browse. Planks propped on tree stumps act as bookshelves. More upturned logs are scattered around as seats for a reading and writing group. We use only materials found on the site, a necessity that becomes a principle for the duration of the festival – site-specific materials used to shelter the books at each hub. Each library structure will prompt different engagements from readers – a library of straw bales enticing individuals to snuggle in with a book, in their own quiet space; a mobile wheelbarrow library encouraging browsing while interacting sociably over drinks and food. (see Figure 3)

Today the books are under a tent. The forecast is for rain, promising a break in the heatwave that has wilted Europe. But the air is thick and stagnant with heat and humidity. The camp is pent up with pressure too, anticipating the long walk before us.

For our first public reading session Dee chooses a small, slim volume, Dylan Thomas' *The Outing* (1955). The opening paragraphs are aptly concerned with complex preparations for a journey, albeit in this instance by bus. After the reading we pull out blank notebooks and invite our temporary reading group to write their thoughts and responses. Common themes emerge: anxieties over the distance that awaits us, individual abilities, stamina, reflections on the preparation and the measuring up of what one really needs to survive and endure. Someone writes a long list and then scores out each item, realizing that 'all that I really need is my body. So, I start to walk with it.'

### *20 August 2012, Menen to Mouscron, 12 km*

Today we begin the journey, an event heralded with books hand chosen for carrying on foot: Hilaire Belloc's collection of essays, *The Footpath Way: An Anthology for Walkers* (1911), Tamara Ashley and Simone Kenyon's artists' book, *The Pennine Way: The Legs That Make Us* (2007),



**Figure 3.** Installation of library in wheelbarrows at Engelandhoeve, Turnhout.

Laurie Lee's memoir, *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (1969), Jay Griffiths' manifesto, *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time* (2000)...

We set off much later than planned, our anticipation flattened by a long wait (for what, no-one's sure). It's an inauspicious start as Misha has hurt her shoulder before the journey has even begun. Our volunteer librarians for Week One, Agnieszka, Amanda and Hilary, have travelled from London, Prague and Wales. Already our library is knotting together lines of relations – we have journeyed here, will walk together, and then continue on our various ways.<sup>20</sup>

Menen is a small town. Before long we walk a dust track running through a field of tall corn. For those hoping for pastoral landscapes (including us) this scene is a red herring – a field in a town rather than a route towards the countryside. Crossing momentarily into France, we look down onto multiple motorway lanes. Belgium, the geographical centre of Europe, is a crossroads for the continent's major routes. The dust track has given way to hot tar. My walking boots are overstated. We pass through suburban hamlets called 'Paradise' and 'Purgatory'.

During lunch at a roadside bar, I attempt to share with my table companions insights from Arthur Sidgwick's *Walking Essays* (1912). Sidgwick discusses – without judgement – the babble of the walker, noting forms of desirable utterances: natural babble, spontaneous monologue, and 'relatively continuous and intelligible statements' that concern the weather and the utility of hard-boiled eggs.<sup>21</sup> I fail to compete with the babble around me so locate a more attentive audience resting in the shade of a tree. For the post-lunch period, Sidgwick recommends a song which 'the whole company may sing without regard to one another or to any laws of time and harmony'.<sup>22</sup> Our Belgian acquaintances oblige by teaching us a Flemish children's song. Sidgwick has earned his place on this walk. The library has been activated.

Continuing along neat suburban streets, we constantly change formation, lines between wayfarers becoming trodden into passages of security. Manicured gardens host a zoo of statuary – flocks

of ducks, guardian eagles, wise owls, prancing horses. Nature is plaster cast. Our library carries almost no books about suburbia.

At our home for the night, La Prairie, we collapse into hammocks, as if having walked hundreds of kilometres rather than the first 12. My legs are flaring with a heat rash. Our library becomes a special delivery service, individual books selected for each person, our emerging knowledge of companions merging with our librarian's knowledge of the catalogue: Thomas Bernhard's *Gehen/Walking* (1971) (one of the few books we have that is in German) for Suzannah (from Stuttgart); Wrights & Sites playful instruction manual *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere* (2006) for Laura (a geography student from Antwerp); Daniella Colafranceschi's mini-essays, *Landscape + 100 words to inhabit it* (2007) (Spanish original) for Peter (Italian, but resident of Barcelona). At the close of our first walking day, talked out and visually sated, the book offers a sideways space from sociality, a barrier to conversation. Books used as shades for tired eyes or pillows upon which to rest weary heads – *detournéd* books – signal a retreat from walking; from doing it, from reading about it, from reflecting upon it (though not perhaps from dreaming about it).

### 21 August 2012, Mouscron to Russeignies, 23 km

There is so much distance and flatness in this landscape. Pathways open and extend into thin lines swallowed over the horizon. After hours of walking along dusty roads without any refuge of shade from the oppressive heat we are refreshed with a short passage between a line of poplar and a canal. I walk with fellow artist Peter as he guides Beagle the donkey. Observing us pass by one might think us some Robert Louis Stevenson or similar traveller of the 19th century were it not for the fuzzy microphone projecting upwards from Beagle's back and solar panels draped over his leather saddle bags. With his entirely high-tech load, Beagle works for scientists at University of Ghent, measuring the noisiness of this 21st-century world we walk within. Turning right into another dry dirt track, we leave the shelter of shade and conversation, retreat into our own thoughts, perhaps to steel ourselves from the brutality of the sun.

Walking alone, following my own pace for a time, I see a stationary figure ahead, a woman sitting on a mobility scooter between sky and a freshly cut field of barley. Hilary has stopped to talk to her and when I catch up with them she is offering to read from *The Ground Aslant* (2011), a collection of landscape poems. Hilary translates Thomas A. Clark's poem 'The Grey Fold' for the woman, the reading more a dialogue between them as Hilary searches for the right words or the words that mean something to her audience of one, who sometimes helps her, guessing at what the next image might be. She seems to recognize and place herself in these words as the poem unfolds.

lifting your eyes  
take the small voyage  
out to the horizon  
and back again ...  
... you are the one  
walking alone  
intermediary between  
earth and sky.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes the woman responds 'oui' when the poet addresses a 'you/tu'. She is the intermediary of this vast sky and vast earth. She tells Hilary she wasn't expecting to get out for a walk today and is delighted that she did.

### 23 August 2012, Maarkedal to Herzele, 30 km

We walk through two contrasting worlds; first a rolling patchwork of agricultural fields in the Flemish Ardennes, then an area of suburban streets lined with shuttered houses. Across from a vista point that marks a transition between the two, we have the last human interaction that we will encounter for quite a distance. We stop to talk to a man who we learn has just gone through a divorce and is moving house today. From one of his packed up boxes he offers us a Dutch version of John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992), which he says belonged to his ex-wife. There is an intimate message hand-written inside ending in many kisses. He writes on the book card his reason for making this particular contribution to our collection: 'for good relations on our walk'. My thoughts turn to the symbolic weight that books carry in their exchange. I pack this one in the rucksack, lightening his load. This is a book he wants to take a walk.

Part of the pleasure of the books we carry is that they are personal suggestions or donations. Each book holds a card stating why it is has been suggested, these cards forming collectively an autobibliography.

*The Outing*, Dylan Thomas. 'Quite a few reasons why I like it, but for general circulation, it's energetic, rhythmic and particularly absorbing when it's wet! Mind you, as a hardback, it's extremely small/light, so good in a rucksack!'

Proposed by Hilary Burns.

*Invisible Cities* (1972), Italo Calvino. 'Calvino's dream-like evocation of the city of Venice. A reminder, perhaps, that wherever one travels it is always our point of departure that weighs heaviest in memory. Also it's a small book so not too heavy on your knees.'

Proposed by Peter Doubleday.

*Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1895), Robert Louis Stevenson. '... not too heavy, wonderfully meandering and dreamy at night. I remember reading it aged about 10 and having straight away to look up the word GOAD which I had never come across before.'

Proposed by Elspeth Owen.

*The Living Mountain* (1977), Nan Shepherd. 'I have been taking this book with me while wandering from ring contour to ring contour in the Dark Peak above the Snake Pass and towards Bleaklow. Essential reading on an overnight camp – her chapter on sleep.'

Proposed by Alison Lloyd.

Leaving the man to his removals, we cross into a deserted suburban landscape, and search for a shop or a person to replenish our water supplies. We encounter no-one for miles, with the exception of hostile car drivers revving their engines as they pass us by. We find a vending machine selling potatoes and bread, but nothing to quench our thirst. This is a landscape built for reliance on the automobile.

### 28 August 2012, Waerbeke to Gooik, 11 km (+5 km detour)

We stay together as a group for much of today. Marching to the beat of someone else's imperatives makes improvisation with our library difficult. The Sideways' walking itinerary offers us a dramaturgical structure for our library actions. On short walking days – averaging 12 km – we fill our

rucksacks with a diverse range of books, knowing that we will have time to stop, to read, to engage both our fellow walking-artists and members of the public. Long walking days, by contrast, curtail both our rucksacks' content and our library activities. Today, in my hand, I carry Thomas A. Clark's *The Hundred Thousand Places* (2009) – a single poem unfolding from dawn to dusk and through seasons as it journeys across the highlands and islands of Scotland. I read Clark's opening poem over and over, step by step in step:

once again  
for the first time  
morning<sup>24</sup>

The landscape of here

dusty grey tracks, cornfields, flat lands

is nothing like the landscape of there

green islands  
on blue seas  
blue lochan  
on green islands<sup>25</sup>

But the blue and the green and the sea and the land flicker in front of the buildings, the corn fields, the grey roads, the dust tracks. I read, I look, I read again, I look again, I look, I step, I look, I read, I step, I read, I step, I step, I read, I look, I step, I look, I read. I do not talk. The land shimmers, greens and greys merging, but at the same time differentiating, one from the other. I am here and there, this is here not there, that is there not here, the grey of grey and the green of green, the water and the dust.

At a junction, around noon, we are brought to a halt. Yet more wilting waiting. A scattered line of walkers perches on garden fences, books opened on laps. The sun is high in the sky. I smear on another layer of Factor 50. Amélie is deep in Werner Herzog's *Of Walking in Ice* (2007). Over lunch Amanda recites a section from Henry Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), learnt by heart, word for word, step by step. Reading at the pace of walking, Amanda is reading slowly, walking words into memory and consciousness. Carl Honore proposes slow reading – not necessarily words per minute, but in terms of repetition or reading something in installments over a prolonged duration – as a way of appreciating the nuance and detail of writing.<sup>26</sup>

### 3 September 2012, Brussels to Herent, 26+ km

Stray stalks of straw float loose from between pages – traces of our Brussels library made from bales. Our books, packed and unpacked daily, are travel worn. A frequent question asked of us is 'why not use Kindles?' It is difficult to browse an eBook and eBooks do not carry the material traces of their engagements. Will the personal and kinaesthetic sources of knowledge transmitted through books – the marginalia, hand-written inscriptions and deposited secrets (dried flowers, notes on torn pieces of paper) – reappear in digital form?

In the early 20th century, the Carnegie Trust transported boxes of books to more than 100 centres across the Scottish islands of Orkney, Shetland and Lewis.<sup>27</sup> The material realities of rural living – the peat smoke of the 'black houses' – literally seeped into the book's materiality. Our books carry brick dust from a library reconstructed in an old brick factory, damp from dusks and

dawns, smoke from fireside storytelling, grass, dog ears, smudgy fingerprints. Carried on foot, passed from hand to hand, these books were made for walking.

#### 4 September 2012, Herent to Hulshout, 30+ km

Two hours into our hot walk our path cuts through a vegetable plot. Its owner invites us to stop for a cup of tea. Librarian Monique shares from John Seymour's *The Fat of the Land* (1961) an extract about moles transforming from foe to friend. Our host donates a translation of Paul Coehlo's novel, *Brida* (2009), 'because his characters always go on journeys, literal and metaphorical'.

The book I keep close at hand today is poet Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002). Walking alongside a river, litter clogging its surface, I enjoy imagining the glistening, cool, fast river Dart of Devon. As the soles of my feet and the joints of my hips wear the distance, dipping into *Dart* pulls me along, out of the monotony of walking. Oswald's *Dart* is represented through the people whose lives are interconnected with its passage. In this landscape of flatness the people we meet stand out as landmarks: the young girl keen to visit foreign lands who donated an Atlas, the guide who presented us with champagne en route, the Druids protesting the decimation of their forested area by a new motorway. But other mnemonics of place are the books we read *in place* – suburban vegetable plots/*Fat of the Land*, a city river/*Dart*, a parched field/*Of Walking in Ice*.

#### 8 September 2012, Klein Engelandhoeve, Turnhout

Our festival hub, Klein Engelandhoeve, is a site of garden plots and pathways. Filling five barrows with books, we wheel our library to festival-goers basking in the sun. The Walking Library as mobile form follows in surprisingly well-worn tracks. In 1894 British librarian J.D. Brown envisaged a time when libraries "will be in a position to make door-to-door deliveries of books to towns by means of actual travelling libraries on wheels."<sup>28</sup> The mobility of libraries radically mobilizes the aspiration of public access, with the collections travelling to publics rather than functioning as fixed centres to which publics must travel. This mobility seems a doubling of the oft-cited metaphorical mobility claimed for reading, where one is transported to another world.<sup>29</sup> Our ambulant library offers different trajectories of mobility *into* the world and perhaps presents a way not to escape it, but to engage or connect with landscape from different perspectives of other times, places, and points of view. Librarian Tom places Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountains*, a book about the Cairngorms range, atop a 'mountain' of twigs beside a path – the highest point we can find. The book is a cairn on this summit.

Up on the plateau nothing has moved for a long time. I have walked all day, and seen no-one ... Man might be a thousand years away.

Yet, as I look round me, I am touched at many points by his presence ... It is in the paths themselves; even over boulder and rock man's persistent passage can be seen.<sup>30</sup>

#### 10 September 2012, Turnhout to Beverdonk, 17 km (+5 km )

Our guide for the day has walked from Belgium to Santiago de Compostela. The distance we have to travel today, for him, is no more than a leisurely stroll. En route, we visit the Priory of Corsendonk that houses a library where Erasmus studied and now hosts corporate team building events. In the evening, the other Walking Librarians and some Sideways' artists gather around the books set up

in a row along a drinkless bartop, pulling books randomly to read to one another – a book bar. Libraries are social spaces, their activities extending beyond the lending of books.

### 11 September 2012, Beverdonk to Beringen, 35 km

Today is the longest walking day and we are without a guide, who is in bed with flu. Instead, we are given a map and a page lined with numbers of routes to follow. The walkers attempt a steadfast pace to meet the distance, but the progress is interrupted by what might be a more mundane relation between reading and walking: the studying of maps. While the Sideways' organizers deliberately staged this longest leg to be more an exercise of endurance than leisure, walkers inevitably decide the conditions of their own edification. Claudia falls away from the group and the maps' diversions to follow Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on solitude in his *Meditations of a Solitary Walker* (1782). She has been carrying the book for many days, unable to find the time to read it. Today, with her shoes dangling from one hand, the book held in the other, we leave her behind.

### 13 September 2012, Zonhoven to Zutendaal, 19 km

For the last two kilometres of the final leg of the Sideways' journey we librarians pass between us a selection of books carried in Monique's coat pockets, taking it in turns to read randomly from early 20th-century English poet Edward Thomas' *One Green Field* (1906) and contemporary artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle's *Handbook for the Itinerant* (2012). We are followed by a horse-drawn carriage carrying the Mayor of Zutendaal and other officials who have joined us for the moment of arrival at the end of the trail. The group reading helps us overcome the unnerving sound of the horse's hooves hitting the pavement and the excruciating pain of blisters. The texts are broken up by tension, anticipation and exhaustion, but the ground is smooth and even, allowing us to read while walking together. We read in short bursts, our focus moving between printed lines of words to tree-lined path and back again. I do not retain much of the texts' meanings, either while reading or listening but the act of reading and the sound of it encourages my focus outward and onward at this stage of the journey so close to its end, but also to my body's limits. At our final destination, the Leiteber Centre, I share a haiku from 17th-century Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō saying goodbye to the road at life's end.<sup>31</sup> We collapse onto a sand heap outside the centre and enjoy a bright green liquor offered by our hosts.

## Conclusion: in the foothold of the story

Our Walking Library offered a creative and mobile methodology for exploring questions of the multiple relations engendered between reading, walking and writing. Andrea Phillips, reflecting on her experience of artist Tim Brennan's performance walk *Mercator manoeuvre* (2005), notes that the task – to walk, look and think simultaneously across a historical breadth – is 'profoundly demanding' and 'certainly not a natural or easy procedure'.<sup>32</sup> If Phillips recognizes the profound challenge issued by walking, looking, thinking and listening in combination, adding reading raises the stakes. Where Brennan's co-mingling of activities was precisely orchestrated, ours – through the Walking Library – was more improvisational, open to chance, accidental alignment and juxtaposition. Reading on the move, with multiple readers and multiple texts, created an unplanned pathway of readers, writers, materials and environments – 21st-century survivalist celebrity Ray Mears brushing up against 18th-century philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in an old brickwork factory. Where Brennan maps out a 'political and social narrative' for the participant to unravel,



**Figure 4.** Walking Librarians read out loud and on the move nearing the walk's end.

peripatetic, unplanned and slow reading in shifting contexts mobilized the potentially fixed content both of text and landscape, setting them in dynamic and unpredictable relationship, with both book and land always in the process of singular formation – an occurrence rather than a given.<sup>33</sup> Walking simultaneously through books and environments meant taking neither as objects of knowledge but instead engaging in a practice of ‘ambulatory knowing’, knowing ‘as we go, not *before* we go’.<sup>34</sup> Reading on the move – and reading is always to some extent done on the move – casts reading as wayfaring. Indeed, as Ingold notes, reading and walking in the landscape are shared processes: ‘To walk is to journey in the mind as much as on the land: it is a deeply meditative practice. And to read is to journey on the page as much as in the mind. Far from being rigidly partitioned, there is constant traffic between these terrains, respectively mental and material, through the gateways of the senses.’<sup>35</sup> Through the Walking Library’s side-by-side positioning of walking and reading, presumed partitions *between* the mental and material terrains are dislodged by a relation of both, what Donna Haraway refers to as the co-constitution of the material-semiotic (see Figure 4).<sup>36</sup>

Whilst Sideways marked out a daily route for the festival, mapping a known beginning and ending for each journey, our reading inserted interventions into this linear trajectory, offering other journeys, diversions, overlayings, aligned and juxtaposed backgrounds and foregrounds, histories and geographies, people and places, voices and narratives. But similarly, each journey served to insert into each library book mobilizing interventions. The book, as much as the landscape, forms on the move because reading, as much as writing – and walking – is a creative and performative process that brings together intellectual comprehension and physical action. Whilst Ingold proposes that the typed line of a text does not go out for a walk and is therefore ‘dead’,<sup>37</sup> in this instance, the typed line is literally taken out on a walk and unleashed through its reading into lively and unpredictable forms. Reading *out loud* in various contexts on the move and at times of rest along the journey asserts a communal and bodily experience of reading and writing, in terms of a dialogue shared with those present and with those voices of the past that speak through the words read *as if* present. This may be understood as more akin to Medieval practices and perceptions with

reading experienced as listening and writing as speech, whether read aloud or to oneself. For Medieval thinkers the chorus of the *voces paginarum* or 'voices of the page' comingle and engage in dialogue with the reader/listener.<sup>38</sup> Ingold suggests such an approach to reading is comparable to wayfaring where the page is an 'inhabited landscape' and to read is to travel in the company or in the footsteps of these voices of the past in order to 'retrace a trail through the text'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the landscape through which we walked was both made and unmade by the cacophonous texts with which it was set in relation, at the same time as it rewrote those texts through its felt and sensed particularities and reliefs.

The physical experience of walking – the demands made by it – also influenced the experience of reading. That the materials most often read on the move were collections of poetry might confirm a fundamental relationship between walking and rhythm – in Elias Canetti's words, 'Rhythm is originally the rhythm of the feet'.<sup>40</sup> This risks presuming that walking – and indeed poetry – carries a single rhythm and that the space through which the walker moves is without its own complex rhythms. Whilst walking might seem a repetitive act, repetition necessarily contains within it difference – counter rhythms and arrhythmia – as do poems.<sup>41</sup> The popularity of poetry as a walking companion might more simply be a pragmatic response: it is difficult to follow a long line of words whilst also keeping an eye on the line of the walk ahead; you are less likely to lose your place in a poem than in prose; and, the lines themselves, though short, are able to withstand – indeed call for – re-reading. But even when we chose to walk with prose, the effort of walking and our breathlessness broke the text into fragments, reconfiguring it to our own rhythms – a rewriting prompted by walking.

Our experience of reading whilst walking suggests that reading disrupts or offers an escape from walking or proposes different understandings of what a walk can be. When pain threatened to overcome the senses and eclipse any other thought or focus, it was less one foot in front of another than one more line. The 'length' of a book helped too – with distance sublimated into pages – just one more page/just one more kilometre. In this context, one experiences the book *through* the body – the body becoming the book and the book the body.

If our reading is cast here as wayfaring – negotiating paths by approaching the material of the book as a becoming-in-process rather than a presented object for contemplation – then so potentially is our writing: 'breaking a path through a terrain and leaving a trace, at once in the imagination and on the ground, in a manner very similar to what happens as one walks along in a world of earth and sky'.<sup>42</sup> Our reflective writing, however, reveals the immense challenge of 'breaking a path'. The influence of our initial bias towards books peddling Romantic ideals of walking and land is evident in the pejorative terms through which we describe the spaces encountered – flat, monotonous, dull, grey... The rucksacks' heavy content impresses itself upon our writing. We approach garden statuary through an idealized, Romantic frame of 'Nature', our perspective influenced clearly by the books we read and know. In admitting disappointment in the landscape, an equation between 'Walking' and 'Pastoral' is revealed. The notion of 'a walk' seems to conjure ideas of particular places – a moral geography of walking that our library both discloses and, initially at least, reinscribes. Our library and our writing is also filled with all-too-familiar tropes of walking – freedom, escape, adventure, solitude, reflection, penance, endurance. In following these well-trodden paths, those laid down in advance for and without us, we know *before* we go, and thus never actually set off, having arrived before leaving. We might carry books on our backs but we fail in many moments to take them – and ourselves – for a walk.

The still-dominant Romantic discourse of walking admittedly becomes a more precarious foothold for our imaginings and writings as the walking and reading unfold over hundreds of kilometres. Here, we are reminded of Phillips' perception that in Brennan's practice it is the 'co-mingling of critical activities' that keeps in check the 'romanticism of an over-identification with the feet'.<sup>43</sup> Each day, our increasingly diverse collection of books offers up materials to be hand-picked for

carrying and companioning ‘along paths of movement’,<sup>44</sup> their stories interweaving with an expanding multiplicity of others that are read, remembered, shared, heard. As stories meet, new context-specific ones emerge, extending the path into the future. At the end of the perambulatory festival, we donate the Walking Library to Sideways which, in turn, will lend it to other organizations, facilitating the forging of more as-yet-unwritten stories and paths. What and where would walking be or go without the stories that narrate it?<sup>45</sup>

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## Notes

1. <<http://www.tragewegen.be/nl/about>> The organizers of the festival created a route specifically for the event that would connect up the green areas and footpaths that remain in Belgium, but are under threat from growing urbanization. In this respect the Sideways Festival walk joins the genre of long walks and marches of political protest or activism that carry a message and cause. Here, the intention was to encourage people to walk as an alternative mode of transport. However, this walk was not only symbolic but performative, forging a path across the country. Whilst the total distance was long, the duration of daily walks differed from between 12 and 30 km.
2. Heddon presented a paper exploring walking and friendship at the Excursions conference (see ‘Turning 40: 40 Turns’, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 17(2), 2012, pp. 67–75). ‘Stories from the Walking Library’ arises out of the context of Excursions.
3. See B. Fincham, M. McGuinness and L. Murray (eds), *Mobile Methodologies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
4. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011).
5. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 154.
6. Hayden Lorimer, ‘Telling Small Stories: Spaces of Knowledge and the Practice of Geography’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28, 2003, pp. 197–217, p. 204.
7. Lorimer, ‘Telling Small Stories’, p. 200.
8. Hayden Lorimer, ‘The Geographical Field Course as Archive’, *cultural geographies*, 10, 2003, pp. 278–308 (p. 294).
9. Anne Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 17.
10. Wallace, *Walking*, p. 198.
11. A. Black and P. Hoare (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 7.
12. A. Black, ‘The People’s University: Models of Public Library History’, in A. Black and P. Hoare (eds), *History of Libraries*, pp. 24–39 (pp. 29 & 32).
13. Dewey’s first classification was published in 1876.
14. T. Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845–1975* (London: The Library Association, 1977).
15. Kelly, *Public Libraries*.
16. The University of East London’s symposium, ‘The Artist in the Library’ (2011), brought together

- more than 80 artists, researchers and librarians to explore how libraries' 'spaces, systems and structures provide inspirational possibilities for artists' as well as how 'artists' involvement, working processes and interventions' could inspire librarians. See <theartistinthelibrary.wordpress.com> (7 January 2013).
17. Other curates more than 200 handmade, miniature books whilst the Itinerant Poetry Library is filled with 'poetry-like' material, described as Lost and Forgotten. See <<http://vimeo.com/39005078> and <http://www.thepoetrycubicle.org.uk/TIPL/indexTIPL.html>>
  18. In order to provide a sense of the historical scope of the Walking Library's collection, we include the date of the original publication of books, rather than the edition stocked by the library.
  19. We nevertheless carry traces of all the books suggested, as their details are recorded in our mobile card catalogue, even if the physical book itself does not accompany us.
  20. Tim Ingold's *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007) is the book most frequently browsed by our itinerant artists. Volunteer librarians were Amanda Young, Hilary Ramsden, Tom Stone, Lynn Goh, Amy Sharrocks, Louise Douse, Agnieszka Gracza, Monique Besten and Lucy Frears.
  21. Arthur Sidgwick (ed.), *Walking Essays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), pp. 11–13.
  22. Sidgwick, *Walking Essays*.
  23. Thomas A. Clark, 'The Grey Fold', in H. Tarlo (ed.), *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011), pp. 39–52.
  24. Thomas A. Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009), p. 7.
  25. Clark, *Hundred Thousand*, p. 18.
  26. Carl Honore, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed* (New York: Harper, 2004), p. 228.
  27. T. Kelly, *A History*, p. 213. Andrew Carnegie was a generous supporter of public libraries. Coincidentally, the Walking Library was supported by a Carnegie Trust grant.
  28. The first regular mobile library service in the UK, the 'bibliobus', was launched in Manchester in 1931. Precedents include James Coats Junior's (1841–1912) delivery of books to lighthouse keepers on Ailsa Craig every New Year's Day (together with two pipes and 2 lbs. of tobacco) and the 'borrower-distributor' system in Herefordshire, whereby one person in each hamlet became the 'borrower' of a small collection of books which were then shared amongst neighbours (Kelly, *A History*, p. 284).
  29. N. Wire, 'If You Tolerate This...', in *The Library Book* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012), p. 135. The mobilization of books remains a current practice. Camels in the Garissa area of Kenya carry book boxes to the temporary sites of nomadic peoples, whilst donkey libraries are used in both Ethiopia and Colombia (the 'biblioburra') to transport books to children. Contra Costa County Library has installed Library-a-Go-Go vending machines, whilst other metropolitan centres use literal sites of mobility as sites for book circulation – with public libraries located in busy metro and train stations ('biblio metros' and 'biblioestacions' in Madrid, Sao Paulo and Bagota). W.H. Smith established 'railway libraries' in the 19th century (Black and Hoare, *Cambridge History*, 2006), p. 11.
  30. Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008), p. 59.
  31. Matsuo Bashō, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005).
  32. Andrea Phillips, 'Walking and Looking', *cultural geographies*, 123, 2005, pp. 507–13, p. 507.
  33. See Ingold, *Being Alive*.
  34. Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 230, 179.
  35. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 202.
  36. Donna J. Haraway, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
  37. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 191.
  38. Ingold, *Lines*, p. 14.
  39. Ingold, *Lines*, pp. 16, 91.
  40. Elias Canetti cited in J. Hall, 'Foot, Mouth and Ear', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 17(2), (2012), 36–41 (p. 36).
  41. T. Edensor (ed.), *Geographies of Rhythms: Nature, Place, Mobilities, and Bodies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

42. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 178.
43. Phillips, 'Walking and Looking', p. 513.
44. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 143.
45. For more information about the Walking Library see <http://walkinglibraryproject.wordpress.com/>

### Author biographies

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