



NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST: A/R/TOGRAPHIC WALKING AS CONTEMPLATIVE INQUIRY

Kristen C. Blinne
SUNY College at Oneonta
kristen.blinne@oneonta.edu

Kristen C. Blinne is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of Communication and Media at the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. Her work focuses on listening, contemplative philosophies and practices, and arts-based and ethnographic methods.

Abstract: This essay explores the relationship between walking and writing, utilizing performative poetry as an a/r/tographic mode of contemplative inquiry.

Keywords: poetry; performative writing; a/r/tography; walking

This story contains a variety of divergent paths, seeking to arrive at no final destination. My words circle in time, bending back to revisit and explore new terrain simultaneously. As a reader, you have multiple options of how to journey with this essay. One route is to follow the walking path, not stopping at the various signs or markers along the way. Another path encourages you to stop and visit scenic landmarks, taking breaks to contemplate. Finally, another route avoids the walking path altogether, exploring the "information center" as its own story-journey. I also invite you to leave the path, if you do not feel like walking today, or create your own unique route to journey through this essay.

*

[Enter the path here¹]

*

This place,
our space,
a piece of paper,
an essay,
a moment in time,
a step between
two strangers,
or friends,
acquainted only
briefly
in this short
movement of
words,
possibilities,
white spaces,
and black letters.

*

Arriving nowhere,
we travel
beyond ourselves to
find each other.
Here.
Now.
Breathing.
Reading,
Moving

Sharing
Becoming-together.

*

*

*

How do I
a/r/tographically
write walking into being
by employing both
walking and writing
as methods of inquiry?

*

*

[Turn¹]

*

How do I walk
with
words
when
text
limits
my movement?

*

[*Typing.*
Legs crossed,
one foot tapping
gently on hard tile.
I pause to rest.
Hands over eyes.
Perhaps it is
(im)possible to
write-
walking?]

*

Walk away.
Return.
Write.
Invite.

*

*

Walk with me.
Take a trip.
Journey.
Feel your body.
Expand its potential.

Breathe.

*

But remember:

*

"Every step faces both ways:
it is both the ending, or tip, of a trail
that leads back and through our past life,
and a new beginning that moves us forward
towards future destinations unknown"
(Ingold and Lee Vergunst²).

*

We are not alone in this moment.
You are here with me.
We move together through life
loving,
learning,
teaching,
leaning,
embracing,
surrendering

*

[Scenic View³]

I am because you are.

* *

*

I want to know...
What moves you?

*

*

A rainbow?
A passionate kiss?
A beautiful song?

*

*[Stretching,
touching,
imagining,*

What moves me?]

*

Walking,
Dancing,
Words,
Art,
Nature,

*

You.

* * *

*

*

*

*

I walk to...

go outside and explore
new spaces and places
celebrate relationality
recognize embodiment
remember the senses
practice contemplation
acknowledge the sacred
inspire play and childlike wonder

*

*[My feet
greet the
cool, moist
grass, crunching
leaves
become
dust.
In the distance,
a dog barks.
Shades
of green with
specks of yellow,
red, and
orange
dance as
trees wave,
leaves rustling*

*with warm
air, calling
forth the smell
of fall.
I listen to the
landscape
with closed eyes
and open palms-
full of wonder]*

*

[Rest stop⁴]

*

Why writeabout walking?
Why walkabout writing?

*

*

*

"To write is to carve a new path
through the terrain of the imagination,
or to point out new features on a familiar route.
To read is to travel through that terrain
with the author as guide -
a guide one may not always agree with or trust,
but who can at least be counted on
to take one somewhere"
(Solnit 73).

* *

Walking-writing...
a process
of the body
mind,
heart,
self,
in conversation
with life.

*

*

"Walking, ideally,
is a state in which the mind,
the body, and the world are aligned,

as though they were three characters
finally in conversation together,
three notes suddenly making a chord"
(Solnit⁵)

*

*

Walking is...
Reflexive, Multi-sensory, and Embodied

*

I embrace

*

*

Writing as a form of walking.
My fingers are lyrical.
They move with purpose,
yet they transcend texts
by surrendering to process.

*

Writing is walking.

Walking is writing.

Walk-write, walk-write.

Write-walk, write- walk.

*

The body...
a sensuous agent of perception.

My body...
a body in motion
wants to walk,
in this moment,
with you.

I write.

Employing, engaging, performing, (em)bodying
body techniques (Mauss 95),
inform how I live my body - reflexively.

*

I walk
walk
walk
walk
walk.
write

write
 write
 I...
[Leaving my desk,
I answer the phone.]
 *
 ...embody *interaction*.
 I am
 invested with biology
 (culturally constructed),
 historically-situated,
 emerging from
 performative interactions.
 Somatically attending
 (Csordas 140),
 I awaken to you.
 We inter-are.
 *
 Inter.
 are.
 Inter.
 Being.
Interbeing
 or
Tiep Hien.
 *
 *
 *
Tiep -
 "being in touch with"
 and "continuing"
Hien -
 "realizing"
 and "making it here and now"
 (Nhat Hanh 3).
 *
 *
[Detour⁵]
 *
 *
 "When did our walk begin?

When will it ever end?"
(Ingold and Vergunst 1).
Traveling through our lives,
we walk and talk.
Insomuch that,
"Life itself is as much a long walk
as it is a long conversation" (Ibid.).

*

I walk
and
talk
with
the
world.

*

Communicating,
feeling,
moving,
doing,
being,
becoming,
(un)becoming.

*

"Being-in-the-world,"
"Always becoming,"
"Being-together"
(Shepherd 24).

* *

*

Ying and yang.
I have a body. I am my body.
I see and am seen
Subject.
Object.
Body.
Self.
My "I"
is a
"Me"
to others.

*

*

My body...is...
material,
symbolic,
social,
disciplined,
sexualized,
racialized,
gendered,
classified,
theorized,
spiritualized,
dissected,
analyzed...
Political.
It moves me.
I hope to move you.

*

*

Walking together,
my mindful body embraces my embodied mind.
Consciousness vacillating between

*

[Look both ways before crossing⁶]

*

* *

*

active agent/
passive object/
sensed/
sensing/
touched/
touching/
The lines begin to blur...
walking,
bodies,
social landscapes?
Horizons of possibility.
The space between
you and me.
Self and environment.

*

*[As I type this,
I try to find a comfortable
position in my chair.
I feel my fingers on
the keyboard –
typing rhythmically.
I am in this moment -
staring at the screen-
waiting for what comes next.]*

*

I exist in,
am,
and act through
my body
but...
Do I ever actually encounter my body?
I am in the world
in a bodily way,
Living and having an
understanding of my body.
I bodily act in the world,
without conscious thought.
My self *is* embodied
experience made flesh.

*

[Fork in the path⁷]

*

*[I need a break.
Grabbing some water,
I succumb to the
softness of the sofa.
My eyes close slightly,
yet my mind races.
Trying to relax,
I realize I am losing this battle
between body and mind –
self, colliding with thought and space.
I return to my desk.]*

*

"I have access to knowledge
of my body only by living it"
(Grosz 86).

*

*

*[As the cold glass touches my lips,
I surrender to the fluid
experience of drinking water.
I Imagine that it desires me
as I feel the liquid sensation
in my mouth and body
as it travels through me.]*

*

I

alter,
adjust,
expand,
relive,
story,
perform,
practice,
and act in relationship.

*

*

Going outside,
I walk,
walk,
walk,
walk.
My feet connect with the ground.
I tune into and out
of my surroundings.

*

I contemplate,
meditate,
explore,
sense
myself,
others,
the world.
I walk,

walk,
walk,
walk.
My feet become the ground
soft,
firm,
right,
left,
forward,
back.
I
breathe.

*

[Take a break⁸]

*

*

Tuning into
and out of
my surroundings again,
I blend,
discover,
sense,
create,
and
maintain,
myself,
others,
the land.
Mother Earth.
I am
colliding with space
place,
sight,
sound,
taste,
touch,
NOW.

[Trail marker⁹]

*

*[Pine needles
blanket
dark earth
in a sea of
deep
rusty
orange
while
tall trees
form a
canopy
above me.
I pause and
run my fingers
over dry,
patterned
bark.*

*A nearby brook
babbles
countless
stories of
the forest –
my home
away from
home.]*

*

*

*

The boundaries between
the body
my body
your body
the Earth's body
become,
together,
shaped,
interacting.
I am because you are.
My eyes,
skin,
feet,

bones,
muscles,
carry me – you.

*

[A Clearing¹⁰]

*

*

Into and beyond myself
Walking is a tool of
route-making
path-clearing
way-finding.

*

*[Digging through a my bag,
I locate my field journal.
Worn edges and rain dried pages
with blurred ink show
the landscape that wrote me.
Pressed flowers and poems
about being-there,
walking, and getting lost
present themselves
as old-new friends
wanting to journey
with me in this moment.
Closing my eyes, I sit on soft grass,
and I remember walking....]*

*

"Being Home"

*

Balancing,
eyes closed,
walking in circles,
I stop...
still and silent,
waiting for tomorrow,
still hoping to arrive and embrace today.

*

Tense,
I cling to all that is not yet,

waiting for the sun to creep out from behind
the clouds.

*

Soft steps create small echoes in time
Holding on and back,
I ready myself to dance...

*

between earth and sky
then and now
you and me.

*

"Becoming Home"

*

Breathe.

I feel my breath
rising,
falling,
rising,
falling

Breathe.

*

In this moment, *now* stands alone

*

unrecognized
uncelebrated
unanticipated

*

Yesterday passes,
tomorrow comes

*

quickly
slowly
mindfully
mindlessly

*

Breathe.

I feel my breath
rising,
falling,
rising,

falling
Breathe.

*

I find strength in breath-
beauty in breathlessness,
peace in presence,
empathy in absence,
Breathe.

I feel my breath
rising,
falling,
rising,
falling
Breathe.

*

Dancing with
body and breath
bone and flesh
gesture and spirit
water and movement

*

I am standing in-between
yesterday and tomorrow,
embracing the
transformative potential
of...
rising,
falling,
rising,
falling...

*

Now

*

Breathe.

*

Walking is mindfulness
manifested or autopilot unattended.
Walking is an escape
from and move towards the present.
Walking socializes spaces.

*

*

I am lost.
I find myself.
I lose myself.
I am found.

*

Sharing a visual field,
pace,
rhythm,
direction,
that is unique,
but connected
we step through life together.

*

[Exercise caution¹¹]

*

*My life a series of steps,
Paths followed roads not taken
Merges into yours
We meet at the crossroads
of our experience*

*

*

* *

Where will this path lead us?
Are you following me
or am I following you?

* *

*

*

*

*

Taking the next step...
Let's discover together
places that
inspire us to
connect,
give back,
write,
breathe,
love,

share,
sense,
feel,
and
move
beyond
ourselves.

*

In the words of
Hanh (73)
"Peace is the walk.
Happiness is the walk.
Walk for yourself
and you walk for everyone."

*

[Exit trail here]

REFERENCES/CO-WALKERS

Coylar, Julia. "Becoming Writing, Becoming Writers." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2009, pp. 421-436. doi: 10.1177/1077800408318280

Csordas, Thomas. "Somatic Modes of Attention." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1993, pp. 135-156. doi: 10.1525/can.1993.8.2.02a00010

de Cosson, Alex. "Textu(r)al Walking/Writing through Sculpture." *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Ideas*, edited by Gary Knowles and Andrea Cole. Sage, 2008, 277-286.

Duncombe, Stephen. *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. The New Press, 2007.

Edensor, Tim. "Walking in the British Countryside: Reflexivity, Embodied Practices, and Ways to Escape." *Body and Society*, vol. 6, no. 3-4, 2000, pp. 81-106. doi: 10.1177/1357034X00006003005

Emerson, Ralph, and Henry Thoreau. *Nature/Walking*. Beacon Press, 1991.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1994.

Ingold, Tim. "Ways of Mind-Walking: Reading, Writing, Painting." *Visual Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2010, pp.15-23. doi: 10.1080/14725861003606712

Ingold, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Ashgate, 2008.

Irwin, Rita. "Walking to Create an Aesthetic and Spiritual Currere." *Visual Arts Research*, vol. 32, no.1, 2006, pp.75-82.

Irwin, Rita, and Alex de Cosson. *A/r/tography: Rendering Self Through Arts-Based Living Inquiry*. Pacific Educational Press, 2004.

Irwin, Rita, and Stephanie Springgay. "A/r/tography as Practice-Based Research." *Being with A/r/tography*, edited by Stephanie Springgay et al., Sense Publishers, 2008, xix-xxxiii.

- Jo Lee, and Tim Ingold. "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing." *Locating the Field: Space, Place, and Context in Anthropology*, edited by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, Berg, 2006, 67-85.
- Macnaghten, Phil, and John Urry. "Bodies in the Woods." *Body & Society*, vol. 6, no. 3-4, 2000, pp. 166-82. doi: 10.1177/1357034X00006003009
- Mauss, Marcel. "Body Techniques." *Sociology and Psychology*, RK Publishing, 1979, 95-123.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and Invisible*. Northwestern University Press, 1969.
- Nhat Hahn, Thich. *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation*. Parallax Press, 1996.
- Pelias, Ronald. *Performance: An Alphabet of Performative Writing*. Left Coast Press, 2014.
- Pink, Sarah. *Sensory Ethnography*. Sage, 2009.
- Redick, Kip. "Wilderness as *Axis Mundi*: Spiritual Journeys on the Appalachian Trail." *Symbolic Landscapes*, edited by Gary Backhaus and John Murungi, Springer, 2009, pp.65-90.
- Richardson, Laurel. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, vol. 2, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. Sage, 2000, 499-541.
- Slavin, Sean. "Walking as Spiritual Practice: The Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela." *Body & Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2003, pp.1-18. doi: 10.1177/1357034X030093001
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. Verso, 2001.
- Springgay, Stephanie, et al. *Being with A/r/tography*. Sense Publishers, 2008.

ENDNOTES/INFORMATION CENTER

¹ What type of wanderer are you? I invite you to imagine yourself embarking upon two different journeys. The first, a train trip through the mountains wherein you sit back and watch the passing landscape as you travel down a pre-laid path that stops at specific times and locations. To make this trip, all you have to do is board the train and let the experience happen to you. Now consider the second journey, a backpacking-hiking trip through similar terrain. On your walking journey through the mountains, you have numerous choices on how to travel the landscape. You can take the trails already carved out by those before you or you can create new paths, side routes, or travel along alternative trails to investigate the wilder, less-discovered places. With no clearly defined destination, you are able to explore a variety of routes to get to the other side. In considering these two travel scenarios, what do you discover? What type of traveler might you be? What are the benefits and/or obstacles of talking the walking-path? In our travels, I invite you to explore the walking-path as a way to embody your explorer spirit.

² To embody my own explorer spirit, I embrace *a/r/tography* (Springgay, et al. xix; Irwin and de Cosson 28) and play with performative writing (Pelias 11; de Cosson 277) as a method of inquiry (Richardson 500; Coylar 422) that merges with walking as a contemplative practice (Emerson and Thoreau 69; Edensor 82; Slavin 5; Irwin 75; Macnaghton and Urry 173; Ingold and Lee Vergunst 2; Lee and Ingold 72; de Cosson 278; Solnit 5; Pink 151; Redick 66; Ingold 18) to present *walking as an a/r/tographic mode of contemplative inquiry*. Employing writing to walk-about in this essay, I contend that walking, as a mode of contemplative practice, creates possibilities for wayfinding, pathclearing, and *interbeing*. Not only will you (the reader) and I walk [move] through my thoughts, by choosing among the various reading-walking routes, but we will walk with walking as a journey of discovery.

³ By doing so, I hope to move you to consider the power of walking as an *a/r/t/graphic* mode of contemplative inquiry that creates space for us to reflect on and embody what matters most in our lives as it unfolds in the present moment. Considering this further, Ingold describes walking and its contemplative connection to writing and our journey together by stating, "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 gateway of the senses" (20). To better understand this connection, I often walked between paragraphs to reflect on my words, to feel my body in motion, and to connect to the landscape of my mind and of the world. Solnit also speaks to this connection when she contends,

When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories, and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains (13)

Building on this, Irwin and Springgay describe *a/r/tography* as a "process of unfolding art and text together (art in this sense could mean poetry, music or other forms of artistic inquiry)" (xxvi). Key to this process is recognizing the value of self-study, the role of community, and the importance of relational and ethical inquiry within *a/r/tographic* research. Within this process, one attempts to open conversations, unsettle perception, and engage in dynamic movement.

⁴ As I travel both terrains simultaneously, I am reminded of Eduardo Galena, who in speaking about utopia, poetically states, "She's on the horizon...I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What good is utopia? That's what: it's good for walking" (qtd. in Duncombe 829). Even as I try to find her (utopia), it is the search, the journey, and the process that thrills me. In contemplating this further, I realize the closest I can come to understanding utopia is to surrender to the present moment. To find joy in body – my being – right now. I tune into my breath, and remind myself why I walk...for something greater than me.

⁵ In numerous wisdom traditions, walking has long been considered a mindfulness activity or tool of meditation and contemplative practice. Not only is walking a process that brings the walker into the "now" or present moment when practiced mindfully, it also can lead to enhanced closeness and sociability with others. Not only this, but walking can also teach us about how we "tune into" and "out of" ourselves and our surroundings. How we go from modes of autopilot to being mindful of each step and each breath, walking in tandem with the energy around us. In other words, it helps us see how we are connected to the pulse and flow of life, insomuch that we can play with how we see and experience the world.

⁶ To practice this heightened awareness, I invite you to go outside and practice being a tree. At first glance, this request might appear strange, but what I am really asking is for you to experiment with your subject-object awareness. First, find a comfortable seat in front a tree and focus your awareness fully on it, noticing both its visible characteristics (size, shape, texture, colors, or other sensory details) and what it is communicating energetically (if you feel nothing, this is perfectly fine, too). Now, pan out your awareness like a camera from the tree, slowly moving away towards yourself, noticing the sensations of your body touching the ground, your breath, temperature, tensions, or conversational chatter.

Practice shifting your awareness back and forth from the tree and then back to you. After you have completed several rounds of this, center your awareness on the space between the tree and you. Spend some time observing this space, living in the moment between. Can you observe this space with all of your being? Were you able to see the tree (and yourself) without imposing names, labels, judgments, associations, or other knowledge you have acquired about it, thereby actually preventing you from seeing it as it actually is? At first, you may have noticed you were both observing and being observed (by yourself and the tree).

As your awareness of the space between is transformed, this experience of observation may have shifted to a space of complete attention. It is in this space that we stop comparing or drawing lines of difference between us, surrendering to the moment completely. Perhaps you were able to experience a brief moment where you were no longer translating your observation into words and thoughts, but instead felt a sense of integration with the tree such that you became it and it become you. In yoga, this is referred to as *samadhi* – a space of complete, limitless energetic integration wherein everything you are becomes what is as it unfolds, and in this space, there is no observer at all.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty illustrates this unfolding presence with his notion of the *flesh*, an elemental, yet intercorporeal bridge between the self and the world, which blurs the boundaries between the seer and the seen, hearing and heard (133). The world becomes intertwined with the self as the *flesh* interacts beyond the limits of the body. The intersubjective, lived body is neither completely a body nor the world, but a hybrid being created and sustained by *flesh*. The *flesh*, a temporal and spatial element between perceiving and being perceived, does not exist in binary divisions nor as oppositional modes of being, rather these aspects continuously intertwine as neither mind nor matter, but rather an element, forming an adhesive between worlds and bodies. Walking creates awareness in the *flesh*.

⁸ In addition to offering opportunities for mindfulness through awareness of *flesh*, walking, as Lee and Ingold argue, bridges embodiment, and sociability, inasmuch that, "walking affords an experience of embodiment to the extent that it is grounded in an inherently sociable engagement between the self and environment" (68).

⁹ Lee and Ingold further suggest that the boundaries between the body – my body – and the environment become blurred due to shifting sensory perceptions that occur among the eyes, feet, ears, and skin. Walking as a method of inquiry offers additional space to both look and feel within, while simultaneously looking and feeling out. They discuss this further by stating, "Firstly, walkers can progress outwards to perceive their surroundings in a detailed way, and secondly, they can also turn inwards to the realm of thoughts and the self. In between such inward and outward perceptions, however, there can arise a directness to some of the feelings and experiences generated by walking" (72).

¹⁰ It is through this encounter that we meet in this place (text) space. In this embodied interaction we communicate. As Lee and Ingold contend, "It is *through* the shared bodily engagement with the environment, the shared rhythm of walking, that social interaction takes place" (80). In our interaction, I hope to have moved you or at least created a rhythm of movement with you, so that we could wander together in this brief encounter.

¹¹ I fully embrace the notion, not all who wander are lost. Reflecting on this, I see this walking project as a search, offering opportunities to wander through theory, method, fieldwork, writing, analyzing, and formatting, letting my imagination carry me where it will. Therefore, walking as a method of inquiry is both process and product, interacting and unfolding simultaneously.

As a contemplative mode, walking can help people become fully aware of the present moment so they can participate in life in a more intentional, conscious, and embodied manner. Allowing myself to wander as a I walk, I can begin the process of letting go of my preconceived research goals, questions, and assumptions (as much as is possible), so that I am able to concentrate on emerging feelings and thoughts, while participating and observing interactions, and experiences between myself, others, and the environment. How I creatively and imaginatively interpret these encounters, through descriptive text, stems from a space of full, embodied participation that comes from not planning for the future. To do this, I must remain open, flexible, and nonjudgmental about what arises. Thus, I walk to know myself and others, to give myself the time and space to connect with both my inner world and the world around me. I walk to feel my body connecting to earth, grounding and centering. I walk to breathe new life into my life.

I walk to feel my feet connecting to the earth beneath me. Shifting my weight forward then backwards, balancing in the space between, I embrace each step as a place of possibility. My awareness does not stop at my feet; it moves up my legs and torso to my arms and neck, extending beyond the boundaries of my skin to the world around me, enveloping the soft breeze, the warmth of the sun, the smell of flowers, the sound of birds chirping in the distance. Deeply inhaling, I pause at the top of my breath, inviting my lungs to fill and expand, and then relax as I exhale, pulling my stomach towards my spine. I study my breath as I breathe in and out with awareness, still noticing my feet. It is through our feet that we become grounded in life, learning how to rise or reach for the sky. Opening myself to my breath via walking continues to expand my boundaries in more ways than I ever thought would be possible. Finding small moments of pure flow and surrendering to the divinity of the present moment brings me back to the trail again and again.