

I WALK, THEN WE ARE  
CLARA GARÍ





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# I walk, then we are

Clara Garí



## Prelude

It was August 9, 2020; we were walking from Tàrrega to Penelles under a relentless sun, at more than 30 C degrees, and we stopped at a fountain in El Tarròs. It was a very simple and small urban fountain. To drink of it you had to bend down and open a tab that was on the floor. A jet of more than a meter then gushed bravely wetting the neck and the heated back of the thirsty traveller. The water rose in a joyous and vigorous column and to drink a little of it one had to insert the whole head into the stream which, intercepted, spilled out of the basin, and ran singing along the floor as if escaping from the devil.

I really liked that fountain that offered the water with such generosity and in such an unsustainable way. I clumsily drew it in my travel notebook.

The fountain made me think of what happens when doing research. We can know, recognize, and cite the sources, but *they* don't know what they give, and they don't care either.

What the sources give is only known by those who drink of them<sup>1</sup>.

## To Walk

The walking art has no muse. Although it has sometimes tried and even succeed to be a practice among the Fine Arts, it is not. It is not like painting, nor like music, nor like dance. But neither is it like nordic walking, nor like running, nor like trekking. More than these activities, the art of walking is related to the art of living. An art that is played in traveling on foot, in the field of the body, in suspended

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<sup>1</sup> The following text has its remote origin in a contribution to the *Tránsitos Cartel* that I shared during the pandemic with Nora Ancarola, Celeste Reyna, Laura Llevadot, Montserrat Rodríguez Garzón, Javier Peñafiel, Diana Rangel and Laura González Palacios. Although the Cartel was not formalized nor published anything public, although my expectations were not completely fulfilled and I have lost sight of a good part of the companions of that very special moment, I want you to know, Javier, girls, of your role of source for me, in that work that united us fleetingly.

time, nomadism and sensory openness to the environment. Grand Tour<sup>2</sup> (a 250 km trek lasting three weeks that we carry out every year and that constitutes largely the experimental field of what I am going to expose below) seeks to unite the art of walking with what all those visual artists, poets, musicians, choreographers, or theatre writers can contribute with their commitment and skills. All this in a specific place, a specific geography that is walked and experienced with the body of each and one.

Although, as I will comment in this text, Grand Tour was designed to improve the involvement, commitment, and reception capacity of the public towards the Fine Arts, these objectives have been overwhelmed both by the mysteries of landscape and by the great potential of the project to modify individual attitudes and create ephemeral and nomadic but resistant communities, capable of organizing and building their own universes. Now I investigate and record what happens in the Grand Tour trying to understand how the process unfolds and how it is inserted into the reality that gives meaning to the trip.

In the lines that follow I will comment on some of the characteristics that most fascinate me about walking and traveling on foot: how walking transforms what we call landscape, what a is a path and how, in turn, the path transforms the walker. I will talk about the body and the soul of the walker and how muscles, senses, imagination and thoughts interact in walking. I also wonder in this text how walkers relate to each other, how an ephemeral and nomadic community that travels on foot is articulated and constituted, and what role the very fact of walking plays in this. To finish, I will remember my time at the exhibition *Voces que Caminan* in the FAYC Cerezales Foundation and the *Walk to Dawn*, so full of hope, just a few days before the arrival of the spring.



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<sup>2</sup> Grand Tour is a three-week, 250 km walk in which the public participates with artists from all disciplines. We organize it annually from the Nau Còclea Creation Center in Camallera, Catalonia <https://www.elgrandtour.net>

## There was a time before

I discovered what it was like to travel on foot at the age of 25. A *sherpa* whom I loved very much taught me the first secrets of the art of walking: finding my way around the earth, sleeping under the stars, measuring time without a watch, going out of context, cooking with a candle flame, being a foreigner everywhere and preferring a discreet port to a flashy peak. He taught me to feel with my legs the delicate engineering of an old path laid out centuries ago with elegance and intelligence so that anyone could walk it - a loaded mule, a pregnant woman, an old man, a small child -. He taught me to distinguish between the millenary old paths and the new ones, opened by trail runners to ascend or descend quickly, or by loggers equipped with heavy machinery to clear a forest. On my own, I also learned during those summers to listen to the soundscape, to walk in the dark and to find the best corners where strawberries and raspberries grew. I also discovered the alpine flowers, gave a name of my own to each of them and later learned to name them with Linnaeus' botanical taxonomy.

At that time, walking was far from my studies in Art History and my research as an artist. The time has passed and I have changed "nature outings" to "walking trips" and "excursions" to "in-cursions".

For many years I ignored almost everything about artists who had walking as the axis of their practice. News arrived later: the Situationist drifts, the subsequent elaboration of Stalker<sup>3</sup>, the writing of women like Rebecca Solnit<sup>4</sup>, walking as a strategy of political action<sup>5</sup>, or the geographical use of the planet made by Simon Faithfull<sup>5</sup>



I kept walking and, above all, thinking about how to share the intensity of my travels, looking for the proper way to express them

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Stalker is a collective of architects and researchers linked to Rome III University that came together in the mid-1990s. In 2002, Stalker founded the Osservatorio Nomade (ON) research network of architects, artists, activists and researchers who work experimentally and participate in actions to create self-organized spaces and situations.

<sup>4</sup> *Wanderlust* Rebecca Solnit is a very beautiful example. Also an interesting article of Honi Ryan in the digital magazine Interartive in 2018  
<https://walkingart.interartive.org/2018/12/Walking-presence-honi-ryan>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.simonfaithfull.org/> Simon Faithfull was with us in Grand Tour in the Ebro Delta in 2019



in a way that they would not turn out just like the pages of a vacation diary or as a strictly subjective experience. At the same time, Nau Còclea<sup>6</sup> had developed as an atypical Art Center, the project that has supported my professional and personal life. Còclea wrote for me the script of how to be neither a cultural manager nor an artist and to drift like that, without fully entering any of the sectors and professional houses that welcome collegiate people.

On that long journey towards what could be called the formalization of my walking art proposal, there was a milestone: Llauro (1998), a project by Alicia Casadesús. Llauro was a one-year cycle of works<sup>7</sup> produced by the artist with the collaboration of poets, musicians, and dancers. Each event was different, but all included walking as an introductory strategy and common thread of the proposals. Once a month she called us somewhere in the Collsacabra (a mountain that is like her home) and took us to a significant place. There was something in the site that she had created in collaboration with one or another artist. There were installations and actions of great beauty, but there was more: accompanying and leading the public, creating expectations, dilating the tempos; all of this opened a new space and prepared people for the reception of the work with a much stronger commitment. Those who attended the events of the cycle (of which an excellent catalogue was made) still remember them, more than twenty years later. I haven't forgotten them either.

40 years ago now, in 1983, when there were still no travel guides nor spiritual tourists, I had walked the Camino de Santiago. And in 2003 I did my first personal Grand Tour, figuratively speaking because then, naturally, the project didn't even exist in my mind. I left my house located in the Alt Empordà region in Catalonia, and walked with my dog to the Ebro River Delta some 300 kilometers south. The itinerary did not follow the classic GR7 that runs through the country from north to south: the stages, instead, were conditioned by those whom I was going to visit along the way, especially artists, people who had investigated things that interested me, friends, and beloved ones. They welcomed me into their homes, and we shared a night, they walked with me, or they simply came to have dinner at the pension or at the camping where I was staying. It was a revealing journey, because I began to understand what happens to people who walk together. The type of relationship that

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<sup>6</sup> In 1996 Josep Manuel Berenguer and myself founded the Contemporary Art Center Nau Còclea in Camallera, Catalonia, Spain

<sup>7</sup> Llauro 12 Cites 1998-1999 Alicia Casadesús <https://www.aliciacasadesus.com/llauro%C3%B3-12-cites>

I previously had with my hosts did not allow me to presume the intensity and intimacy of the communication that was then established with some of them. Some I literally got to know again. Many welcomed me into their homes, into their workshops, they led me along their favourite paths, they narrated their family stories and their childhoods to me. Everyone expected something extraordinary from our meeting, although I had proposed almost nothing to them. These two antecedents – Llauro by Alicia Casadesús and my trip to the Ebro Delta in 2003 - slept in my mind for many years until they woke up as the response to a great concern.

In 2012, as the director and only survivor of the Nau Còclea Art Center - at that time the human team of the centre had shipwrecked in the deep economic crisis and I worked alone - I asked myself what was the point of my role as curator and its relationship with my work as an artist and also what were the foundations of the institution that supported the Visual Arts from the Renaissance to the present day. What worried me most was the question of whom was I working for. Who were those who were supposedly served by our *mise en scène*, our installation of the work, in complicity with the artists? What did it mean in the 21st century to be a curator, an art critic, an art expert? What did it mean to be an audience, to be the public of the work of art? How valid were the teachings of Martin Heidegger on man as guardian of art<sup>8</sup> today? I was very concerned about the little relationship between the visitors and the artworks, especially in the case of our exhibitions. After the cordial and social act of any opening, the problem was not how many people had come – although there were not many – but how they had spent their time in the opening event : it was difficult to discover in the visitors any commitment, any intimacy, the necessary concentration that would allow them a minimal connection with the artwork. From those exhibitions in which the artist had given soul and body, the visitor seemed to take nothing away, despite his great esteem and admiration for both the artist and his work.

So, at the very worst moment, as happens in stories in which the heroin is most lost in the night, a small light appeared I considered the idea of a walking travel as the uncertain and hesitant possibility

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<sup>8</sup> The authentic relationship to the work cannot be elucidated on their part in terms of joy or pleasure but in terms of "knowing" or safeguarding (Bewahrung). Those whom we incorrectly call the spectators are in reality the guardians (die Bewahrenden) of the work, who are called upon by it to correspond to and defend the truth that is announced in it" (Martin Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art in Forest Paths).

of starting a new paradigm for the reception of the arts trying to restore communication between artists and the -so called- public or visitors.

Exploratory changes are made relatively unconsciously. Only when the experience has been decanted is it possible to recall what has happened and to describe it as a story. There were many intertwined objectives in what I intended to do: modifying the space in which the artwork is displayed, introducing time (or rather temporal awareness) into the Visual Arts, engaging the visitor with the work enough to keep his attention awake, produce the inner silence that allows full perception. All these objectives implied ruptures: breaking with the privilege of the White Cube as the optimal architecture, for example, but also with the stage of the theatre or the musical auditorium that forced a static and passive corporal disposition of the audiences. Questioning the habits and rituals of the spectators. Discussing the system of hierarchies in the creation and transmission of concepts and symbols from the artist to his/her audiences. Ruptures that in turn required new scenarios in which commitment, complicity, emotional tension, and the availability of the public were essential.

All this is past: it is still early to systematize all the expectations that have been fulfilled in these eight years of the Grand Tour, and to synthesize many other that have unexpectedly appeared as unusual pearls along the way. Indeed, after those eight years of traveling, the perspectives have changed, and the world has also changed: currently there are many proposals and a lot of interest in walking, with or without Art.

Now, for the researcher, it is like being in a forest where there is still too much undergrowth to move through. There is no shortage of studies about landscape, the body, or the fact of walking, sometimes there are even excessive. There is also no lack of experiences. The point is more about opening paths or finding and following them. These paths have their starting point the cultural context in which the Grand Tour has unfolded; or are linked to the experience of the travellers and to my personal experience. Some of them I have already spent many hours working with, while others I have barely had a slight intuitive touch, like a veil half lifted during a dream.

I will point out some ideas, almost as headlines of what I hope will be a more extensive work over time: a different way of understanding the concepts of *landscape* and *path*, the walker's



bodily relationship with the path in walking, the role of time while journeying on foot, the concept of compass in group walking, or the formation of ephemeral and nomadic communities; are some of the stages of this adventure.

### **Other Landscape**

What is landscape? What does landscape mean? In ordinary language, landscape is almost synonymous with natural beauty, be it marine or alpine, gardenized or wild. Landscape referred to urban geographic contexts is much less common and, of course, people never speak of "office landscape" "landscape of industrial estates" or "landscape of suburbs".

Landscape usually refers to the human contemplation and what we look at is what we usually call nature (another slippery concept). Landscape is "that beautiful nature that the human observe and admire". This is how through language; the human is separated from the territory in which he should be rooted: the landscape is something that *belongs* to the observer and in this appropriation transforming landscape into an object, the view has a preponderant role. Indeed, the landscape is something that is appreciated mainly with the eye. Other senses, touch, smell, hearing have less importance in the perception of the landscape.

In this concept of landscape, what we human look at is not just any place, any environment that is offered to the eye. What we look at and admire is *beautiful nature*: this is how it is decided what deserves and what does not deserve to be *landscape*.

At first glance we may not realize to what extent such frames are anthropocentric and colonial. The immense reality, the snowy mountains, the rough sea, the infinite starry sky, and even the intricate craters of the moon; they are not landscape if there is not a human being looking at them. Ah, but if anybody looks! In this case, the bipedal subject, upright, with the eyes open facing the world, observes and admires how creation, the universe unfolds and thus, with his eyes and with his presence, he creates the landscape: with his gaze *he gives birth to it*.

At the same time, there are places that are not considered landscapes, no matter who looks at them, because their lack of beauty does not allow them to access that category. The landscape that is loved, that is protected, worth of social, political and scientific interventions is a visual reality dependent on the human eye and

belonging to the category of what deserves to be seen: it is within the accepted canons of beauty. Observing, qualifying, even protecting the landscape, still today implies a dissociation that labels us as prescribers of nature rather than as subjects of it.

This is, to say the least, a complicated backpack.

However, there are other paradigms.

When traveling on foot we do not walk on a sports track: we walk through the world. That is why the walker finds himself, without exception, faced with the concept of the landscape. The walker is in the places, not only observes them. The nature not only shows him its charms: it offers him resistance, makes him cold or hot, makes things problematic or facilitates the journey. Walking, it is not difficult to live the experience of *another* landscape, which cannot be contemplated from the outside, but in which one participates. This other landscape does not belong to us, rather we belong to it and in it (not *in front of it*) our prescriptive privileges are diluted. The walker who walks for long enough finds difficult to observe distancing from him. His experience is like the feeling of belonging to the land, the country or the terroir of those who inhabit a place, either temporarily or permanently. It is in this *other* landscape that many of the things that are explained here occur. They happen in *another* landscape traversed by contextual paths.



### **The contextual paths**

It is necessary to talk about the path and the walker without dissociating them. Trying to discover what a path is while understanding what it means to walk, because both things, to be understood in all their richness, must be approached simultaneously. We look at two types of roads, those that have a physical and a semantic dimension and those that only have a semantic one. Physically, a road is a civil engineering construction designed and built to be travelled on. From the semantic point of view, a road is a

system of signs to guide the traveller in the right direction. The physical road is also semantic because its very layout indicates the path, but the semantic road sometimes has no material substance, as for example the markings of a GR in a forest without a path or the Way of the Stars in the night sky that leads to Compostela. The physical road, built, open, has an exciting cultural and historical dimension. Its dry-stone walls, its bridges, the curves of its route interest us because they speak of a millenary history to which we belong. The semantic path also offers us surprises, albeit more immaterial ones.

On the other hand, we also look at the transformation that takes place in the walker when he walks for a long enough time - and this is the main reason why we must study simultaneously the walk and the walker. Little by little we look at what happens in his body and in his senses, in his soul and in his emotions, in his thoughts and in his reveries. And we also observe what happens in the individuals who walk together.

Walking is a simple action that we learnt when we were just beginning to live and that accompanies us - a little or a lot - throughout our lives. A simple standing upright and moving the legs that engages the whole body and the senses, slowly moves - and transforms - the organism through the spaces that are walked through. Walking is always contextual, situated, a case of the *other* landscape.

If this seems less obvious to us today, it is because we walk much less than humans did only a few decades ago. Not to walk is a possibility that did not exist before, at least for healthy people, because almost everyone needed to walk every day to get around. Walking to the field, to the office, to the factory or to school, to the boat or to the vineyard, to the dance, to the market, to the café. To get bread. To fetch the doctor. To pick up the newspaper, to go to church, to buy shoes. Such were the little daily journeys of people all over the world.

Alongside these short walks, there were also (and still are in some parts of the world) the long journeys on foot, essential to find water or food, to exchange goods that guaranteed the supply of the community's various needs, to flee from natural disasters or to evade enemy pressure. These walks have always been in relation, in one way or another, to the Other. Roman roads, mountain passes, oases; they still exist, and of those that have disappeared, traces remain and

often the main thing remains: the route, especially when it can still be travelled<sup>9</sup>. There also existed (and still exist) routes that did not have a physical road because it was not necessary (e.g. through a desert) or because it was impossible (e.g. through the sea). An immaterial path does not facilitate passage, but it does facilitate orientation. In such a case, the references are the path itself: painted signs, songs, stories, stars, wave movements, even measurements of the time it takes to travel through a given space<sup>10</sup>.



### The journey of elvers

As a child my only image of elvers was that of a rare, delicate and delicious “tapa” of which children barely tasted a bite stolen from the appetizer of the grown-ups. But elvers are not only food, but actually the fry eels. It took me years to learn about the fish, its infinite complexity, and even more years to transform the image of the baby fish, beyond gastronomy, into a metaphor for what a journey meant to me.

There is a place in the world, near the Bermuda Islands, the Sargasso

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<sup>9</sup> The *Octavianes* a group in the catalan city of Vic, leaded by Jordi Lafon and Anna Dot, among others, has for some years now been following the itineraries of a guide to one-day excursions published in 1920 by Octavi Artís. Today, some parts of the itineraries are no longer possible, either because the original public space has been privatised, or because it is crossed by an impassable obstacle such as a highway, or for other reasons. <https://www.annadot.net/es/octavianes/> . Also in this respect, archaeologist Liana Brent's walk along the Appian Way in Italy is very revealing, showing how the ancient Roman road remains in the territory as a path even though it has disappeared in some places. The Via Appia is Easier Going if Taken Slowly" in *Ways of Walking* Ann de Forest Ed. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> 2 There are countless testimonies from all over the world of semantic systems that have existed for the orientation and routing of travellers. Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* appeared in the 90's is a classic of the topic. As an example, this quote by Rebecca Solnit, one of the most beautiful examples: "The nomadic Chemehuevi people used songs to orient themselves in those vast expanses of arid terrain. The songs contained the names of places in geographical order and these were descriptive, evocative, so that someone who had never been to those places could recognise them from the song. Carobeth Laird observed: when a song is sung today, it contains huge jumps from one place to another, as there is no one who remembers the whole route. He went on to explain that the question "how does this song go?" meant "what is the route it travels?". A man inherited songs from his father or grandfather and the song gave him the right to hunt in the territory it described. (...) the salt song describes the route that follows a flock of land birds in which all species of the region are represented. The band "travels through the night, arriving in Las Vegas around midnight, in Parker at dawn and back to its starting point before dawn. If the night in which it is sung is very short, the Salt Song (like the other heritage songs) can be shortened so that it lasts no longer than the night". In this song, the birds began to leave the flock at dawn and each one withdrew to its place in that ordered world of words and places. The song lasted as long as the night and was a map of the world and the arid territory around Las Vegas was the land steeped in the stories of the great myths. The village of Jojave, just south of there, had a Turtle Song that was also the length of a night or several nights" Rebecca Solnit *Guide to the Art of Getting Lost* Captain Swing 2020 pp150-151



Sea. All the eels in the world are born there. The fertilised eggs hatch and out of them come millimetre-sized, transparent, ribbon-like, flat little worms. For a year or two, the sea currents carry them across the Atlantic Ocean towards the coasts of Europe. As they approach the coast, they begin to navigate on their own in search of the rivers where they will feed and grow. They gradually transform into elvers, taking on that familiar tiny snake-like shape. Slowly, the fresh water of the rivers makes them dark and opaque: they look more and more like eels. The males prefer to stay in the estuaries or lower reaches of the rivers, but the females continue their journey upstream. It takes twelve years before they become silver eels. They then begin their descent downstream to the beach, mate with the males and start their way back to the place where they were born. Swimming by day at a depth of almost a thousand metres and at night at about three hundred metres, they reach the Sargasso Sea where they spawn and die. My father once told me that specimens of zoologically unknown worms had been found in Africa. A closer analysis showed that they were elvers which, having been dragged by chance in the wrong direction, had been lost. The time of the journey had been altered and the elvers had arrived not only on the wrong coast, but also at the wrong time regarding to their growth. Thus, their bodies had not been transformed as genetically intended and they could never become eels. Like the elver, the journey transforms the walker without him doing anything but walking. When the journey ends, the walker is, somehow, *another person*.

In my experience, the journeys that transform the walker and open the door to the *other* landscape are always long. It takes time to experience the metamorphosis. Days. To *sleep the space*, to walk to the rhythm of the respiration, to stop thinking and, in the silence of thought, to feel how images and ideas that were hidden but that you certainly know were already in your mind rise to the surface of your consciousness. To feel your body sometimes hot or tired, and at the end of the day to relate each step with all the moments you have experienced. It's not that we don't go somewhere, it's not that the destination is totally irrelevant, because on the journey we all go to our own Sargasso Sea. But unlike other activities in life, it is not only the destination that counts in walking. Above all, it is the journey that counts. Those moments along the way are worth more than the journey, as Mark Geanuleas writes.

*After such a walk, sitting in Madison or Union Square or anywhere else, the whole of Connecticut, Massachusetts, is there with him, all at once. To walk, to travel on foot, is to be-being in that otherness which includes us and which cannot be photographed or mapped simply because it is not something exclusively dependent on vision but a profound and above all polyhedral experience.*<sup>11</sup>

As I sit here writing on a coloured tapestry sold to us in Ghardaia for a few dinars and a pen by a nomadic Tuareg, I wonder how the desert travels has transformed him and the people who has travelled on foot for years, the ancient explorers, the Aboriginal tribes of Australia, the military infantry, the travellers, the Maragato muleteers, the pilgrims and carriers of the world.

I certainly know how it has transformed me.



### **A path**

The road is designed on the ground: path, track, road, forest trail.

What is a path? In the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, this are the first four meanings:

1. Ground on which one usually travels.
2. A road that is built for transit.
3. Journey that goes from one place to another.
4. Direction to be followed to reach some place

Firstly, the land trodden. Then, a road that is built for travel.

Given the relatively small size of its territory Western Europe has an enormous diversity and number of roads that cross the continent. Sometimes we travel on foot along one of them, unaware of the centuries and the thousands of men and women who have been passing along it. But on many occasions it is impossible not to know,

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Geanuleas walking between Middelburg and New York:“ But then the choice is only setting out, beginning. After that everything between Middlebury and the City is what matters: the weather, the towns, the roads, the people; whether you are tired or hungry, whether you meet with friendliness or distrust. Between here and there everything is more important than you, everything must be faced, no mile, no mosquito, no neighborhood can be avoided. It is still you that makes the choice, of course, and still you that arrives, it is still New York into which you finally walk; but what such a New York is predicated upon the world you have had to pass thought to get to it; whereas the other New York, the one you take the train to, is predicated only upon yourself, your desire for it, and the choice you make in order to realize that desire. In the first instance the self is founded upon the world, in the second the world is founded upon the self” Mark Geanuleas Necessity and Choice, en Ways of Walking Ed. Ann de Forest 2022.

because the path itself is full of revelations: the layout, the dry stone walls that flank it, small bridges, chapels, fountains. The unmistakable slabs of a Roman road, the boundary crosses. All these things were built to make the routes easier, not so hard, more efficient.

A few notes from my travelogue during the Grand Tour 2020: the road is, in terms of land, what time zones are for the measurement of time. Although the road is material, linear and sequential, it sometimes disappears and reminds us *that it doesn't really exist*. Winding, subjective, predictable or not, the road is an illusion.

Roads used to be very hard to be built and if they were necessary they lasted for centuries. They were laid out by pruning weeds and levelling the land, diverting water wherever rain could destroy them, bridging torrents with small bridges and strengthen the flanks with dry stone walls. They were laid out, used and maintained with care. The paths were made to facilitate passage on foot or on horseback: with gentle curves they made the ascents and descents and the unevenness of the terrain more bearable, so that an old man or a child, a loaded mule or a shepherd with his goats could walk along them. To facilitate the walk is also to make visible the right direction to a place and to guide the walker, preserving him from exhaustion, fear and discouragement. The paths protect us from the wild, from the dark and from the animal ferocity of the forest. And there was also a time when the road facilitated the journey by protecting the traveller from the arbitrariness of the local landlords, since everyone could pass through the free road without paying taxes or asking for permission. This is how the road became one of the first strongholds of democracy.

The roads also served as territorial boundaries, marking where one property ended and another began, or where the communal pastures of one village or another began. That is why even today the roads still have some public prerogatives, although if they are not travelled for a while, they lose them.

Today, a machine can make or break a road in a few hours. If it is not used, the owners of the adjoining land have no scruples about redrawing the roads and even making them disappear completely in order to modify properties or to unify fields and cultivate them more easily.

The dictionary, however, ignores the fact that there are roads that have not been trodden and paths that, although they are travelled, have not been built for that purpose. It is true that sometimes a path is only the fact that, in a line of walkers, the one who goes first makes decisions in a precise, continuous and regular manner. This is "making a path by walking", opening a path where there is none, a path that, in the mind of the one who leads, is land that has not yet been trodden.

I go back to my notes: the feet follow the road and someone draws a path every time he walks it: "the path is made by walking" as Machado said<sup>12</sup>. In the caravan, someone at the front steps on the path and it becomes the future, the land that the others will tread in a few moments... Stepping on it they build the road again and again with their steps. When the group of walkers has passed, then, as the dictionary says, it is trodden ground: linear furrow in the earth. On our walk today - approaching the Montsec area from the south - the path disappeared several times. It ended in a freshly ploughed field that we had to cross in a straight line in the hope of finding the path again on the other side like on a boat sailing across the sea in a bay, from harbour to harbour. It was very tiring, because it was very hot, the ground was soft, and our feet were sinking into it. Not a shadow on the crossing, until we reached the other side without the certainty of finding the path again.

Road is something material on the ground or a constellar drawing in the starry night. It is history, legacy, culture, a way of inhabiting the land. Path is also, in its most minimal and original expression, movement, orientation of the senses, decision of the body. A few steps that begin the journey that takes us to our destination or that begin the process by which we lose ourselves.



### **What the body plays, what is performed in the body**

Body, i.e. traditionally the tangible, material part of the organism.

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<sup>12</sup> Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote a verse that has become very popular "Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar" which can be translated as "Walker, there is no path, the path is made by walking" Antonio Machado Proverbios y Cantares XXIX 1912



Soul, traditionally spirit or, sometimes, mind.

The first thing is to understand what happens when we walk, why walking changes so many things in our body, in our mood, in our perception and in our emotions. To understand what happens and why it happens. Secondly, there is the question of how and where the process takes place: to understand if the body is the main character, or if it is only the stage where *something is performed*.

To demand the body has consequences, some more pleasant than others. What is counted in the balance of losses is very physical, very concrete, undeniable and quantifiable: thirst, small blisters on the feet, heat, slight burns on the skin. On the other hand, what counts as gain is very intangible and mysterious: there is lightness, a kind of liberation from the weight of the soul, of the mind. The body tires as the soul stops weighing and the mind stops thinking.

At the same time a kind of dissolution takes place and the cellular membrane that encloses our individual beings becomes porous. *I am* yields to *we are*, *we are* yields to *we are being* and *we are being* yields to *we are getting to and we are staying*. This produces lightness and joy. It brings cohesion to the group and integrates the newcomers. In short, the check on the body has two main consequences: the liberation of mental weight and the progressive dissolution of some of the useless protective barriers of the self.

This role is played by the body - with rewards or with collateral damage - , this is undeniable. Knowing how it works is more difficult. And also to understand the question posed in the title of this section: if this is a role that the body plays or whether the body is the playing field; whether the more muscular and organic parts of the body are the agents of change or whether the change is of a mental order, although it is played out in the muscular and organic.

To what extent do bodily tension, posture, effort or movement modify mental and emotional processes? There is undoubtedly a connection between the senses, motor skills and bodily awareness, as Francesc Tosquelles tells us:

*There is no doubt about it: our movements and our bodily attitudes position us in ourselves and in the relations we have with others - and the various objects within our reach. The forms of work and the forms of leisure primarily involve our bodily activities.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Francesc Tosquelles L'enseignement de la folie Ed Privat 1992 p 134, french translation. Antonio Damasio expresses himself in similar terms in his famous essay *El error de Descartes* Booket Ciencia bolsillo first edition 1994 where he develops the idea that it is, so to speak,

In these circumstances it will not be unusual to find some travellers experiencing very noticeable bodily changes in a short time, such as strengthening, weight loss, and changes in skin and figure. These changes have important consequences related to emotional states, self-awareness and communication dispositions. By the fact of staying together, relationships and bonds are established that are sometimes long-lasting, although there are also others that do not go beyond the time boundary of the journey. The organic changes influence creative abilities that are based on a certain postural and bodily awareness.



### **Getting in and out**

I am very surprised by the ease and speed with which people who join the journey integrate. In general, people become part of the group on the first day, in a matter of hours. How does this happen? What is the secret of contextualising travellers in such a short time? I learnt something about this by talking, among others, with psychoanalyst Celeste Reyna<sup>14</sup>, who was part of the team in 2020.. She came to walk for a few days and ended up staying until the end of the trip. In an interview I did with Celeste, she refers to the "story of the group", referring to what other people had told her about Grand Tour before she registered and what she heard during the first days. She said: "I had been told that it was a group in which everyone could be both in and out. One can be in, and one can be out without being obliged to be part of something. There are those who come to develop their artistic project, but it is not obligatory". All of this, she says, "has first to do with the artistic and always ends up being a group phenomenon. For me, entering and leaving is not just about arriving, spending a few days walking, and leaving. Within the walk

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the whole body that "thinks".

<sup>14</sup> 1 Celeste Reyna, psychologist and psychoanalyst <https://www.linkedin.com/in/celeste-rey-na-85468325/?originalSubdomain=en>

itself, there are doors that allow one to *leave*, even if only mentally. For example, a person wishing to leave momentarily could simply keep quiet and walk a little further ahead or a little further back than the rest, and that would be enough to leave. In the same way that regaining the pace of the group would mean *coming back in*. It is something that is easily done.

This brings us directly to an idea that strikes me as extraordinary. It is the potential of the journey to generate an unusually rapid energy of group fusion. This fusion happens in many ways, one of which is what I have called the compass.



### **The compass**

What I mean here by compass is a bodily rhythm, the rhythm of walking, the steps, which can explain something that is in transition between the strictly bodily/muscular and the mental/mood, and also between the individuals and the group.

The concept of compass is choreographic and musical; it is usually referred to rhythm. Here I am reminded of a note written in one of my travel diaries. There were still a few of us, and there was already harmony among us, not without a few incidents. Notes from my travelogue: we walk with a beat rhythm. To communicate with another person we match our step with his or hers. So, walking it is very easy to communicate. We sometimes share confidences. Or not. Keeping up with each other on the way makes things easy, makes the words come out. Sometimes someone else joins in the conversation and in the compass. Other times we stop to pee and leave the conversation and nothing happens. Or we take a photo and say *oh, look, look!* or we dive into google maps to find out how much further it is to go.

It is obvious that to talk while walking, one must match one's own pace with that of the other, otherwise we would hardly hear each other: this is what com-pass originally means: step with, in company. What is surprising, however, is that it is so easy to start a conversation, even an emotionally engaging conversation, while

walking. It is even more surprising that it is so easy to walk away from the conversation without disturbing the interlocutor. Hence the suspicion that it is the compass that intervenes to facilitate communication, just as bodily functions will intervene in the awareness of being a group, as we shall see later. Sometimes the bodily rhythm is more important than the content of the conversation. To pace oneself on the way makes things easier, loosens tongues and paradoxically also allows one to dis-pace oneself without violence. The body in rhythm with the body of the other is the vehicle for flexible communication, and in this context, things happen with extraordinary fluidity.

The best place for compass is on cart tracks and wide paths. It is not possible to compass oneself with another if the road is difficult, if it climbs steeply, when one has to use one's hands to climb. On such roads it is neither easy to keep in step nor to communicate. Nor on a road with noisy cars, no matter how wide, flat, and easy it is. The compass rhythm is always with the Other, and it is choreographic, an art of the body and of communication for staying along the time. More importantly, the compass is always related to the body of the walker and to the terrain, bridging the individual, the group, and the participation in the landscape as we understood before.

The compass is the first thing the group acquires when it starts walking. It is also the first communicative strategy that each traveller who joins the group can perceive. It is a skill that is as much about the individuals as it is about the group and the terrain that is trodden and walked.

As the days go by, the rhythm of walking expands and extends to the rest of the hours, also to the time that we do not walk and do other things such as eating, sleeping, resting. The sequentiality of the steps along the way favours a topological narrative: the *moment* of each event coincides with the place *where* the group was when it happened. This is how the narrative also extends to the entire journey.

In the end, everyone has the same rhythm, they have learned the rules so as not to get out of place, those who were angry one day, those who wanted to leave, and those who were so excited about arriving; or those who slowly appropriated a story that they had heard as it was being unfolded. Along with natural identities, something is born that has to do with group identity. After it, we transform ourselves.



Is the group a provisional body? Yes, it is provisional, but it leaves a mark. The people who have already passed are remembered by everyone, together with everything that has to do with the place, the land and nature. It opens a dimension that seems to me almost miraculous, place, desire, constellations. There is something in this group that does not remain stuck.<sup>15</sup>



### **Time for nothing**

Time is another of the singularities of the journey on foot. Travelling constructs a state of being in which time stands still. The regular and cyclical succession of days and nights, the presence and the involvement of the body in the act of walking, result in a kind of black hole in our usual time, highly marked by completion and the search for productive results. This is how the path offers time to the walker and how time is spent in the common action of walking. This action has a radically unproductive mark. To the extent that the timetables, journey and destination are previously well planned, they contribute to organise a walk without concrete productive objectives, this is a doing in order to do nothing.

Doing nothing is a complicated affair. In fact, it is impossible.

We are always doing. Even sleeping or breathing are things we do. There are meditation techniques oriented towards non-action, but meditating is indeed doing something too.

In short, and simplifying things, one could say that the secret of doing nothing is not producing or doing non finalised actions. Finding ourselves, as is the case today, at a crossroads where the subject is forced to incessantly construct and reconstruct himself as a product for sale, not-doing can function as a strategy that opens the door to a new paradigm. Not doing is the motto for not building oneself and, for this reason, a powerful antidote to the exploitation of bodies and souls. This not-doing/production is always installed in a time without borders. It is in a non-linear time.

There are many non-linear times, in fact linear time is only an

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<sup>15</sup> Celeste Reyna interview november 2020

exception in the constellation of other times. Cosmic times, the times of agriculture, for example, are governed by daylight and darkness of night, the seasons of the year and the cycles of sowing and harvesting. The time of the navigators is governed by the stars. Our body, too, beyond cultural conditioning, is governed by a cyclical time of sleep, wakefulness and nourishment, or fertility. Among these non-linear times is the time of the path, which we internalise almost without realising it. It is a topological time and is marked by the movement of the legs as we walk. Instead of instants it is made up of places, instead of moments it has *here's*, *there's*, which depend not only on the space travelled but also on the body itself. Moments/presence follow one after the other and disappear with every step, leaving no trace or history.

**It is then that, in the heart of uselessness, creation emerges like the flower of the cactus in the desert.**



### **Other forms of perception**

In her sparse but fascinating essay *A Guide to the Art of Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit evokes Menon's philosophical paradox: you can search for what you know you lack, but "how will you undertake the search for that whose nature you do not know at all?"<sup>16</sup> The Art of Getting Lost alludes to the undefined and open-ended search for a totally unknown field. Something like this also happens on the road. Sometimes, just because we walk so close to the thing that deserve observation, we do not know what we must look for, and not knowing leads to the open perception that is necessary to welcome a new paradigm, unprecedented in the attitude of tourist trips where people are supposed to have already decided and been informed about what they can look for. In the coexistence of walking, behaviours appear that lead to the construction of an unknown common place, sometimes preceded by a juxtaposition of small individual decisions: these are explorations and expectations in which it is often not known what is being pursued. Availability

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1 <sup>16</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Una guía sobre el Arte de Perderse*. Madrid, Capitan Swing 2020. p. 8.

increases, influenced by the very lack of operational objectives of the walk itself: participants do not really know exactly where the focus of attention is to be placed, or when the show begins.

Being prepared for something worthwhile to happen is the best guarantee that it will: actually, there are always many extraordinary things happening; it all depends rather on whether we are able to separate them from the general noise and give them the attention they need to flourish.

When one walks for long enough, especially in a group, day and night are filled with nuances and everything deserves to be perceived and interpreted. Attention grows not only to the works of art presented to us by artists; the focus opens, panoramically, on the whole environment: the soundscape, the path we walk on, the bodily sensations. Then, travellers show an ability to open to the unexpected, to play and to share it. Living together in the open air integrates creation into everyday life and collectivises it. It is present when we walk, when we eat, when we talk, when we swim, when we cross non-places, when we listen to animals. There is also a certain continuity between wakefulness and sleep, day and night. Many stories emerge as the journey has a story of its own to tell to newcomers. And there are also those who have already walked and have gone, as in life.

In this way the frontiers that delimit the roles of artist and audience are blurred and a community emerges that can be called neither a group of creators nor a group of audiences but something halfway between the two. It is a nomadic caravan whose uses and customs are rapidly constructed or diluted and which temporarily and to a greater or lesser degree modifies the behaviour of all the participants. Thus, the group transforms into a provisional but solid society, which depends both on the journey and on creation, and which is capable of reflecting, researching and creating in a collective context



## **Epilogue: Caminar al Alba**

As it has been said, this text was published in *Voces que Caminan*, a book about the exhibition of the same name curated by Gabriel Villota and Leyre Goikoetxea in the Foundation FCAYC in Cerezales del Condado, Spain.

I knew the project when it was beginning to take shape and I had the pleasure to share an activity in the context of the exhibition. Now it can be an appropriate example of all that has been said.

*Caminar al Alba* (To Walk at Dawn) was the title of my proposal I made for *Voces que Caminan*, a very simple experience that begins by walking in a group, in silence and in the dark.

Men and women of contemporary societies are almost never in the dark, except when we sleep. Daylight or electric lights always accompany us in public and private buildings, as well as outdoors. Although it is not a difficult activity, walking in the dark is unusual and frightening for many people, even if there is no danger. Nor are we usually silent or in a quiet environment except, again, when we sleep. If we walk in company, we talk. When we walk alone, there is usually a lot of sound around us.

Around four o'clock in the morning the night breaks up. At four o'clock it is still night, whatever the time of year, but even in winter, when the night is longer, at around four o'clock you feel that something is going to happen and the roosters announce it. Dawn is coming.

"It is a hypothesis that the sun will rise tomorrow: and this means that we do not know whether it will rise"<sup>17</sup> The dawn has that fragility which corroborates Wittgenstein's famous quotation. It is night yet, the dawn is a promise for those who are confident, but it is also just a hypothesis that connects the fragility of our logic with the reality out there. We don't know if the sun will rise, but we are confident.

Walking in the twilight all together we can feel like being one big body articulated by multiple feet. Walking in the dark the group is compact. Deprived of vision we sharpen other senses: hearing, proprioception. We feel better the bodies of those who are walking nearby. We find it easier to be bodies walking together, parts of a multi-individual organism, a herd, a flock, a caravan of people... Sometimes we stop for a moment to smell and feel our presence. The

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<sup>17</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Altaya, Barcelona 1994.



presence of people and also that of creatures that are awake at night and now withdraw, or sleep at night and now wake up. And we walk, and feel, and go on until the light finally separates us.

When the dawn comes, we will indeed, without realising it, gradually separate. The vision will enlarge our bodily space, the group will unfold like an accordion. We enjoy the silence together in the different moments that precede sunrise, a moment when everything will be transformed.

Dawn arrives and we have arrived somewhere, the sun arrives and meets us where we are. Then we sit down to celebrate and share the morning, our ideas, our sensations, and our experiences. There were many conversations that morning, many emotions, stories, memories of people who had lived in Cerezales long ago. Some beloved ones who were no longer there. Moments spent in other places that had many echoes of this one. I proudly showed everyone my Maragata woman's earrings, bought many years ago, in my way to Santiago de Compostela.

Walking in the dark and allowing the dawn to catch us also teaches us something about the movements of other living things that sometimes move and travel together, always out of necessity: shoals of fish, migratory birds, desert caravans, people fleeing horror, famine or war. Why do some species come together to undertake a journey? What is our body like when moving among other bodies? And what do we have in common walking together with the living beings we meet?

Walking at dawn, we discover our compass and how, as we walk, we move to the compass of other beings and to the rhythm of the living. It is simple, but intense. In the end we walked at dawn, with our *Voces que Caminan* our walking voices.

Also, in these difficult and dark times, we did it as the metaphor of our determination: to walk towards the light with confidence, so that the light, when it comes, will find us awake.



Camallera, autumn 2022



