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Walking in and out of Place: the Pedestrian Performances of Tim Robinson

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Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imagination

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Walking In and Out of Place: the Pedestrian Performances of Tim Robinson

Daniel Sack

Walking is a passing over time: the body present in each step's fall into lack, catching itself on the ground, already future-bound, moving forward with the next step while inscribing the past in the last footprint. For 40 years the English expatriate Tim Robinson (born 1935) has walked the rural coastlines of Western Ireland (the Aran Islands, Connemara and the Burren) producing a substantial body of books, essays and hand-drawn maps that detail his own body's fleeting engagement with the natural and cultural landscape of these desolate regions. Bringing the historical events of a place into present discourse, Robinson's mediations and meditations on and of the land disrupt an economy of stable coordinated places to propose other ways of knowing and doing. This chapter is an exploration of how we might think of the rural walker as a performer and how his or her practice traverses the outsides of monolithic meaning inherent in the standardized map.

Robinson spent his formative years in the London art scene of the 1960s before turning to walking as a primary medium of inquiry and expression. While he once produced sculpture and installation work, he no longer identifies as an artist, much less a performance artist; yet, by reading the maps and essays that Robinson creates as performance texts, I conceive of them as scripts recalling past actions of walker and author, and positing a further stage for the actions of future walkers and readers.¹ Robinson explains his project as follows: 'I have come to think that, if this process transmits anything of the terrain itself, it is not my limited, personal and changeable responses to it, but the objective ground of the *possibility of that subjectivity*.'² Indeed, an encounter with Robinson's map of the Burren inspired my own first walks in that region of Ireland more than a decade ago. In the pages that follow, I rejoin the walker in attending to those sites that cannot be marked

(temporary tidal causeways and bridges), recollecting the lost practices of the past and their accompanying misplaced names, and, finally, recalling the simple rhythmic fall of the moving foot. These limit-cases of cartography's language produce an unconscious *space* that surrounds the conscious *place* found in any map or any monument, a spatial performance promising that, as long as the walker keeps walking, the past will keep living and will never arrive at an end. In this way the remains of past performances remain otherwise; they live on, in and through other bodies.³

The pedestrian performative: speech act theory and walking

Traditional cartography presents the illusion of a flat and evenly negotiable traversal across a knowable landscape, absented of any reference to how bodies on the ground name and use that land. This dissonance between embodied use of the land and its mapped representation is particularly fraught in the Irish context. As Brian Friel's 1980 play *Translations* reminds us, the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps that the British recorded in the mid-nineteenth century offer a consummate example of the abstraction and erasure at work in conventional mapping. 'The Ordnance Survey Office was established in Dublin in 1824 to carry out a survey of the island for land taxation purposes. By 1846, Ireland had been surveyed at a scale of six inches to one mile, making it the first country in the world to be fully mapped in such detail.'⁴ The OS maps, then, were perfect representatives of an authority that sought to manage an empire's distant oversight through the simulation of an unpeopled view from above. One of its more insidious side effects, memorably represented in Friel's play, was a thorough Anglicization of the place-names of Gaelic tradition, in transferences that range from rough-hewn translations to complete eradication. So the OS maps, coming to Aran first in the late 1830s and the Burren and Connemara sometime around this same period, both unearthed and rewrote the variegated human practices of the island into an authorized and consistent fixed artefact.⁵

Acknowledging the impositions inherent to all mapping, the fact that 'by no amount of stretching can the concept of a text be made to cover the basic topography of an area', Robinson insinuates visual and verbal markings into the gap between the proper and performed.⁶ He distinguishes the cartographic system from the land itself in his express usage of the OS maps of the 1800s as the basis for his own work; Robinson's maps return these places to the Gaelic tongue, pulling out some of

the imbricated histories of lost use and event in the process, to make a lived and remembered site. Rather than commit to his own empiric measurement of line and direction, Robinson appropriated the *langue* or system of the OS map and concentrated instead on 'that mysterious and neglected fourth dimension of cartography which extends deep into the self of the cartographer', the dimension of time and, by extension, the body.⁷ Before considering the graphic techniques that Robinson sutures to the standardized map, let us take a brief detour to consider the conceptual relationship between mapping and performance.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French theorist Michel de Certeau discusses how an individual's quotidian embodied actions operate in a 'tactical' manner, improvising practices available in the moment in a manner at odds with the official 'strategic' possibilities anticipated by authority. Setting up a parallel between the performative speech act and such quotidian uses, his chapter on 'Walking in the City' conceives of the urban landscape as a system of *langue* (the superstructure of language) where every block posits a series of significations from which the user picks and chooses a *parole* (the situated enactment of speech). In the briefest of summaries, we could say that speech act theory, as proposed by the British analytic philosopher J. L. Austin in his 1955 Harvard lecture series and later published as *How to Do Things with Words*, argued against the notion that speech was comprised entirely of statements (or *constatives*) that could be claimed to be either true or false. Austin suggested that speech also includes instances that do not function as truth statements, but instead do what they say. The most famous example of these 'performative utterances' was the wedding vow 'I do', a linguistic event that has felt consequences outside of language. Beyond such explicit performatives, Austin argues that the image of an isolated truth-statement is illusionary throughout spoken language, that all speech events are situated in a temporal context: every constative statement with a certain meaning is surrounded by an intention with its particular force (the *illocution*) and a consequence or effect (the *perlocution*).⁸ While speech act theory originally addressed only spoken events, Austin allows for the possibility of non-linguistic parallels. As such, de Certeau poses the distinction between the constative and performative as the basis for a 'more general distinction between the *forms used* in a system and the *ways of using* the system.'⁹ This provides a theoretical means of approaching non-linguistic performances through the discursive medium of writing while explicitly acknowledging the necessary adaptation from the somatic to the syntactical. In the case of pedestrian performances, the word *discursive*

exhibits its double meaning: as 'passing from premises to conclusions; proceeding by reasoning or argument; ratiocinative'; and, in its more archaic use, 'running hither and thither; passing irregularly from one locality to another.'¹⁰ In other words, the performative acknowledges discursivity as both a linguistic and a somatic claim.

De Certeau distinguishes between the stable *place*, a fixed location of singular and proper meaning, and fluid *space*, a site where mobile elements intersect in an embodied vector. Or, more directly: '[s]pace is practiced place'.¹¹ Place – like the word in the midst of language's net of meanings, only making sense in the context of its surrounds – presupposes a series of other places in correspondence with one another and existing synchronously on a single plane. Separated from the city with its practices on-the-ground, a readable whole appears as a text of transparent reference from which the body has been evacuated. With its transcendent unseen origin of sight, place and its mode of representation, the map, court an imagined death. This 'law of a place', as de Certeau writes, relies on 'determination through objects that are ultimately reducible to the *being-there* of something dead'.¹² Even the map that attempts to inscribe a path of previous use flattens out a chronological passage into its synchronic simulation, referring to the absence of what once was. The mark on the map 'is thus a mark *in place* of acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their remainder, the sign of their erasure'.¹³ As such, a map is always a historical vision, a survey of the past from the vantage point of the passed.

De Certeau does not make the comparison, but in the context of the performative speech act, the fixed nature of place corresponds to that of a cartographic constative utterance. Just as the constative purports to bear a truth-value independent of context and situation, so too, place pretends an unattainably set monadic meaning. On the other hand, space 'occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function'.¹⁴ Following through on this parallel, if we extend the 'chain' of the performative, we see that the walking body occurs on both sides of its constative place and overflows its sited/cited meaning: its illocutionary operations or orienting force an entrance into the placement of a foot and its perlocutionary effect, an exit into the next step. In a way, then, place always occurs *between* the space of the walking act. Tim Robinson, our guide through this topology (etymologically the 'logic of a place') of the step, writes: '[t]hus we, personally, cumulatively, communally, create and recreate landscapes – a landscape not just being the terrain but also the human perspectives on it, the land plus its *overburden of meanings*'.¹⁵ The excess

of meaning produced by walking through place, the fact that the walk always 'oversteps' the placement of one foot by requiring another, is comparable to that of the performative's excess, an over-determination that produces the unconscious and the pleasurable.

De Certeau follows in the footsteps of Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord and others, who write about the ways in which a walker's engagement with the city may stage a personal performance of individual pleasures as a countertext to official expectations.¹⁶ Like the urban pedestrian, the rural walker resists the proper meanings and declarations of the panoptic state, a struggle that is absolutely crucial as these places lose their space to tourism, industrial modernization and the disappearance of oral, enacted history. Where the city of which de Certeau writes presents a site that has been colonized and explicated by the place-bound structures of urban planners, architects, and the like, the rural terrain offers the possibility of a more explicitly spatial site, voiding or at least dispersing definitive abstractions. If, to follow de Certeau and his city walker, 'to walk is to lack a place', then I suggest that the rural walker capitalizes on this placelessness in dis-locations such as the long *unremarkable* stroll between named places (crossing the uniform blankness between marked figures on a map), or through the explication of named places whose boundaries remain uncertain (where a field ends and a mountain begins), or by getting lost, by not being seen.¹⁷

The art of the walk: Timothy Drever (Robinson)

Prior to moving to Ireland in 1972, Tim Robinson (then known as Timothy Drever) exhibited work as a conceptual artist in the London art scene. Walking was a conspicuous presence in British responses to the new modes of artistic practice collectively named Minimalism. To generalize broadly about an incredibly diverse 'movement', the Minimalism coming out of New York in the 1960s involved three-dimensional work that incorporated the embodied viewer in the situation of the artwork, but often effaced any trace of the artist's hand from the finished object.¹⁸ One might say that these were objects that obscured their pasts and left their present open to future engagements. One 'post-minimalist' response to these first pieces sought to incorporate the process through which the work was made into its final figuration. Others took the sculptural object and situation outside the gallery, and even outside the city, in what would become known as Land or Earth Art. The British artists Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, both

trained in the process-oriented vocational programme at St Martin's School of Art, were the first and most prominent artists to take up walking as a medium of production in this context. For example, in 1967 Richard Long produced his first walking piece, a black-and-white photograph recording the path made by the artist's footsteps in a field, the grass compressed so that the light of the sun reflected the trodden line differently than the surrounding blades. *A Line Made by Walking* was, in Long's words, 'a straight line in a grass field, which was also my own path, going "nowhere"'.¹⁹ Here the artist conceives the act of walking as '... a pure medium to make (object-less) art', a repeatable form or action laid atop the land akin to the smooth minimalist cubes and structures considered as the advanced art of the late 1960s.²⁰

The last sculptural pieces that Drever/Robinson produced also reflected a turn to the problematics of walking in ways that anticipated his monumental pedestrian projects in Ireland. As with Long's field that could be anywhen and anywhere, the pieces that Drever/Robinson created in his final years in London were abstracted from the specifics of time and place. In the 1969 installation *Moonfield*, for example, a series of flat shapes with one side painted black and the other white were laid upon the floor in a darkened gallery. Spectators moved the shapes around, flipping them as they wished, to construct a 'map' of their use. Drever/Robinson watched from a darkened corner:

Each person entering the dark gallery finds a new surface, at first unintelligible, which is the record of his predecessor's explorations and will be recreated or annihilated by his own investigations. ... I would like to see it as a work the medium of which is people's actions, structured and rendered symbolic by the structure of what they handle. The 'states' of 'Moonfield' are not works of art, they are momentary records of people's visions, timidities, urges towards symmetry, towards chaos. The 'work' has its being in a structured flux of activity; it is the process of exploration.²¹

Because it was figured in the starkest black and white, one imagines *Moonfield's* traces of action, the 'records of people's visions', touching on the death inherent in place. One enters the gallery to face a map, use it and disrupt its defined meaning, but must ultimately leave it as a second map, another historical place. These are performative acts whose perlocutions (consequences) are incorporated into another actor's enunciation, as a place or word may be changed by another user, as a map may be taken up by another and used otherwise, rearranged. Years later,

as Tim Robinson, the artist would take up the preexisting OS maps in such a manner, as templates for his own manipulations.

Another piece, with the working title *Structured Arena*, remained wholly conceptual art in its unrealized purity. Proposed as an installation, it would consist of a room with a 'concrete floor of regularly spaced shallow waves, perhaps 4 inches high and just over a stride from top to top; the area covered would be large enough for a specific rhythm to be generated by the act of walking across it'.²² Drever/Robinson imagined the completed piece not as a finished artwork, but as a site for actions to be performed by himself, by dance and theatre groups, or by visitors. Variations in light were envisioned as well, artificial movements of a sun overhead revealing the waves in shadow or concealing them through direct overhead lighting or darkness. It is its emphasis on the body's interpretation of the place through a selective use of direction (the vector, if you will) and stride (the act of walking) that brings this imagined work closest to an exploration of the interweaving of place/space. Its realized form, topography illegible in direct light, would have resisted a panoptical gaze from above and could have only been mapped through the user's felt experience foot by foot. Even the controlled place of this 'structured arena' would have resisted stability, constructing its meaningful space as one passed through, its significance dependent on the situation of the walker's stride, direction, lighting and interactions with others.

A pilgrimage in search of the adequate step

Abandoning the art world in 1972, Robinson and his wife, Máiréad, moved to Inishmore, the largest of the three Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. At the suggestion of a local, citing the ever-increasing tourist influx of the summer months, Robinson began work on a map of the island. As a neophyte cartographer, the first map published in 1975 was 'a better image of my ignorance than of my knowledge'.²³ In 1980 Robinson printed a first revision, followed by a second revision in 1996. The maps formed companions to more linguistic turns and in 1986 Robinson published the first volume of a two-part project, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage*. Through its 300 pages Robinson circumnavigates the coastline of Inishmore, unearthing the histories and sites buried in oral lore, archeology and geology. All the while, the walk and the passing of the body through the land are the ultimate subject of the narrative. Its companion volume, *Stones of Aran: Labyrinth* (published almost ten years later in 1995), details the interior of the island. Robinson has also

mapped the regions of the Burren, the mainland coastal area directly south of Galway, facing the Arans and known for its expansive karst wasteland and numerous megalithic sites, and, most recently, the twisting shorelines of the Connemara, the region directly west of Galway.²⁴ Two collections of essays provide a series of ruminations on the topographic experience of the walker/cartographer.²⁵ In essence, Robinson's *oeuvre* presents a subject's comprehensive engagement with the landscape that surrounds his new home, the coastal village of Roundstone on the shores of the Connemara. I will centre this discussion upon the first of the Aran books and its sister map, as it is most concerned with the walking of borders, while drawing on other writings and maps as needed.

Inishmore poses as the site of an ideal map or place, in spite or because of the fact that in practice it reveals the slipping terms of any such proper systematization. The island is a tablet of rock whose edges seem defined and contained, written in its own substance through constant revision by wind and wave, so that its history echoes within open, yet isolated, walls. At the beginning of *Pilgrimage*, Robinson writes that Inishmore 'is the exemplary terrain upon which to dream of that work, the guide-book to the adequate step. *Stones of Aran* [the two-volume sequence *Pilgrimage* and *Labyrinth*] is all made up of steps, which lead in many directions but perpetually return to, loiter near, take shortcuts by, stumble over or impatiently kick aside that ideal.'²⁶ Inishmore represents opposite extremes of the idea of the walk: from without, it rises like a geological footprint out of the ocean with its neighbouring islands of Inishmaan and Inisheer trailing off as second and third steps towards the mainland; within, it holds a maze composed of countless lines of rock. The island is an image inverted, its paths inscribed within the foot. Almost entirely bare rock, centuries of human use have deposited an intricate gridworking of stone walls that cross-hatch the surface, serving the dual purpose of dividing its fields into tiny parcels and paths of proper place (at times several to an acre), while also providing a dumping ground for loose rock, the material excess of this territorial authorization. The map-like grid also mimics the geological figuration of the island, sculpted along perpendicular 'joints' ('a break that leaves the strata in its original position, as opposed to a "fault" that dislocates it') that align the cliffs and valleys according to a natural orthogonal geometry.²⁷ The limit of this geometry/geology, Inishmore's southern coast and the subject of the first half of *Pilgrimage*, is almost entirely composed of cliff face, at times plummeting more than 100 feet to the ocean below.

Written and rewritten in these divisions and subdivisions of land are countless histories at odds with the permanence of their medium, rock. The stone walls, for example, seem to close off a place with definite boundaries (the kind of description promised by a map), but, in practice, the 'field entrances are closed not by gates but by short stretches of specially loosely-built wall, to be knocked down and then rebuilt when the cattle have passed through'.²⁸ In use they counteract the lineation of map and rock to bridge outside with inside. Others are Famine walls, aimless structures built solely for work's sake around the time of the Great Famine of 1845–7, the refuse of an act rather than signifying a location. This follows de Certeau's description of what he calls a 'stratified place', a palimpsest retaining many events:

The legible discourses that formerly articulated [the places] have disappeared, or left only fragments of language. This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogeneous places. Each one, like a deteriorating page of a book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socioeconomic distribution, of political conflicts and of identifying symbolism.²⁹

The walls are literally, 'a piling up of heterogeneous places', of heterogeneous stones taken from neighbouring locales. For example, Robinson is able to follow a certain stone from its foundation in a monastic settlement 1000 years back to its inclusion in a now-derelict military fortress, the mark of a carved cross guiding this remembrance. *Pilgrimage* and other walks rewrite de Certeau's 'deteriorating page of a book' into their emerging bindings.

We see the artist's body – his repeated, rhythmic gesture – in the constitution of the maps. Where contemporary cartographic protocol utilizes a series of textured prints read against a key so that each icon represents a category of landform or proper location, Robinson's hand-drawn ink markings elide into one another with an organic fluidity rather than imposing a distinct divide between one area and another.³⁰ He writes: 'the most revealing features of a map are its blank areas. I think that is one reason I prefer to build up my maps of little dots and strokes of the pen standing separately on blank paper, rather than layers of colour.'³¹ Reduced to the repetition of the simplest dashes and dots, the inscriptions also invest the maps with the artist's gesture, like so many footsteps across the page: each stroke of ink 'stands' separately on the ground of blank paper. Where the official proper map establishes

a binary between significant and insignificant territory by recording marks against the surrounding blank space, the walker necessarily stands astride any such division. Place dissolves into space in a kind of flurry of scratches and cross-hatchings. By reincorporating the blanks of the map into its very constitution, Robinson affects the kind of historical sense cartography produces. For the walker is not a historian, linking together significant events and overlooking others – blocking off one territory to the exclusion of others; rather, he or she is the quintessential chronicler, passing through major and minor events alike. As Hayden White has written, history incorporates a structure of narrative meaning that assumes a causal relation between individual events, leading from beginning to middle to end, whereas chronicles or annals relay a line of events without end: this happened and this happened and this happened.³² Equivalent events accumulate over time side by side, step by step.

Flirting at the border between place and space

Much of what follows is peculiar to coastal walking. Sometimes the tide is high and the path a weaving through rocks, then low, it invites one out into vast expanses of sand, a shortcut around a bay, or one crosses over to what was once an island and suddenly the walk is much shorter or longer between two places. Of the hundreds of small islands off the coast of Connemara several hide tidal causeways permitting access only by foot and only at select times of the day. Robinson calls these 'islands in time' or 'an image of personal contact, a metaphor one lives out in concrete reality', language that situates them foremost as performance and secondly as linguistic formulation (an 'image' or a 'metaphor').³³ Equally significant is the impossibility of locating these temporary pathways, unmarked on any map and solely discoverable through use and in time. Supreme exemplars of a tactical use of the moment, this is land that reveals itself to the user in practice, but leaves no trace or place behind. In this way, the causeways are vanishing stages for the walker, utterances whose constatives disappear after speech, a site of resistance to the map and its coordinates; consummate performances, they are 'islands in time'.

One such placeless crossing serves as the penultimate meditation of *Pilgrimage*, in this case describing a possible passage unrealized by the performer. Off the coast of Inishmore, the small Straw Island was shown as an extension of the mainland on the earliest OS map, but over the 150 intervening years the sea has broken through so that now

only a sandbar connects the two islands. It is said by the islanders that one can wade across this causeway at the lowest tides of the year, but Robinson reports that he has never done so. While still dry land, the spur was appropriately called 'An Chois, the foot, transferred by the act of walking or wading, from the body to the ground'.³⁴ Remarkably, the place-name of the 'foot' survives although its namesake, its location and the bodies that made it, are long gone. It is a site for future possibilities, like all place-names, the incomplete statement of the past that we may someday perform, or utter, in turn. In not walking this stretch of submerged land, Robinson is promising a return, a further pilgrimage. It calls likewise to the reader of map and of text, beckoning one to come forth and take up this lost place in his or her own performed space.

As if to echo this sentiment, the final place that Robinson passes through founds a similarly absent point of arrival. A short distance north of An Chois, Teampall na mBráithre (the Church of the Brothers) marks by name what is only an empty field gathering stones strewn by the harsher winds of the Atlantic. No one now on the island remembers to what its name refers. A loose and lost signifier, there is not a stone or story to explain its meaning. It figures as an ideal end that resists ending and confounds any categorical theory of linguistic meaning. Incidentally, this excess attaches to the name of the larger island itself, where the place 'Inish' (Gaelic for 'island') oversteps its bounds by appending 'more' to its every reference.

If walking is in essence a *passing through* of place that creates space, what of the limit-cases where walking stops? Walking must continue past its stopping place, for, in its most quotidian manner, unless one is dead there is always somewhere else to go. Where we end our walks we mark the land with cenotaphs or standing stones, themselves inscribed with words, images and stories from our past: 'Here lies ...' As de Certeau puts it succinctly in his exploration of historiography, 'writing makes the dead so that the living can exist elsewhere'.³⁵

The line that Robinson follows in *Pilgrimage* is the meeting of place and space, where the two collide into the sharp edge of a cliff. One would assume that here is the edge where the walk ends, where space faces the absolute death of a place. And yet, Robinson's cartographic treatment of the cliffs realizes the seemingly impassable border as an open space in its own right, depicting them from a subjective point of view where drawn semblances of the individual rock shelves replace the uniform line of a conventional map. And in the text of *Pilgrimage* Robinson relates specific sections of the coastal cliffs to a now-absent practice, that of the *ailleadóir* ('cliffman') who would traverse these

edges by rope and ledge, hunting birds by night during the nesting season. 'For the *ailleadóir* the cliff was primarily a geography of variously productive places and the handiest of routes to them.'³⁶ This virtual vertical geography undercuts the authority of any map's boundaries and reveals the line's unseen depths, limits like the tidal shores that may be passed through at some point in the future. Robinson cannot discover any of these hidden pathways and on the one occasion where an elderly islander offers to show him his route down from times gone by, the pair cannot find the particular entrance to this perpendicular maze. It presents a space that cannot be placed except as the walk's exterior to the story of *Pilgrimage*.

I would like to suggest that these limits of the walk, these boundaries that guide it, are not so much resolute impossibilities as the symptom of an unrealized desire to cross over. They produce the unconscious in performance, the wish for a final arrival. As de Certeau puts it, '[t]o walk is to lack a place', which means that one desires a place. Or, as the poet Mark Strand writes in his poem 'Keeping Things Whole': '[i]n a field / I am the absence / of field [...] Wherever I am / I am what is missing.'³⁷ We may read things in the land though they are only our own inscriptions, histories and names; we read our absence from the land. This play of lack and desire constitutes something of a seduction between the two parties that meet in fleeting rendezvous, land and walker. So, too, in walking we find a correlate to the scandalous pleasure of the performative speech act, what Shoshana Felman terms the 'scandal of the speaking body': 'the promising animal, incapable of keeping his promise, incapable of not making it, powerless both to fulfill the commitment and to avoid committing himself'.³⁸ The walker promises another step, never keeping the promise of an arrival at a place, but always renewing his or her vow in the continuation of a movement through further places. Only in committing to the end of a destination would a stable meaning take place and the walker stop walking. This threat of death figures for the walker in the unspeakable and unwalkable, in realizing the myth of a constative meaning without context. Indeed, the cliffs would haunt Robinson in the years to come, recurring again and again in nightmare and rumination, always as the limit to be crossed, the place of death dreamed into a practicable space.³⁹

These limits, then, substantiate the impossibility of arrival at any place other than *here* and *now*, the limit position of the subject *I* in its performative appropriation of the geographic *langue*. The vertiginous look over the cliff grounds the failure of walking and the failure of the discursive; it is a site that one cannot put one's self into, cannot do by

saying, on which one cannot step without falling away. In this way the walk along the cliff and the tracing of its line is emblematic of all performance, which one might call, to quote Beckett, a living constantly 'giving birth *astride* of a grave'.⁴⁰ Robinson writes:

[T]he cliff hangs over what cannot be written. Maybe one can gesture towards it with such strangely expressive words as 'inexpressible' and the mysteriously descriptive 'indescribable', or *one can enact it*, as I have tried to do, exhausting myself in pursuit of inexhaustible possibilities, dancing on the edge.⁴¹

The choice 'to enact' the dance of death is the walking off the cliff, the writing of the book, the drawing of the map. Whether intentional or not, these words that negate themselves ('strangely expressive words as "inexpressible" and the mysteriously descriptive "indescribable"') are comical and felicitous in their excess. Their overabundance produces a pleasure in the promise to continue expressing the inexpressible.

The pleasure of the walk, like the pleasure of the text, comes in the site of the potential or the virtual, its excess of the path and its promise not to arrive. We are not one of Muybridge's horses, leaving the ground between steps, but rather speaking bodies falling from one step into another. Or, as Robinson puts it, '[the step] is a momentary proposition put by the individual to the non-individual, an instant of trust which may not be well-founded, a not – quite – infallible catching of oneself in the act of falling'.⁴² The foot's inscription is a discrete figure standing in for what is not there, the trace of a pleasure past and a departure into future pleasure. Our footsteps create many places along the way, between the official statements of location/locution and a thousand dints of land like An Chois that invite others to walk and that mark our passing before the erasure of the waves:

And then come my boots to add the stamp of authenticity, not of the endless process of the beach which needs no authentication from anybody, but of my own witnessing of it. Is this the image of the work I have dreamed of, that book – with which the present book has a certain *flirtatious* but respectful relationship – preliminary to the taking of an all-encompassing stride?⁴³

Within the territory contained by cartography's unpeopled and unchanging frame, the walker performs his or her self, solitary and unseen, only playing the spectator in a glance backwards at the footprint left behind,

a self-witnessing. Note the words I have picked out above, first writing the walk's book as a dream and then as the flirtation of the seducer. Robinson's text 'flirts' with the book that contains the 'ideal step' as seduction continually promises the satisfaction of desire, but resists its consummation. Indeed, at the end of *Pilgrimage*, Robinson suggests the possibility of walking around the island again, seeing different things, 'but for a book to stand like an island out of the sea of the unwritten it must acknowledge its own bounds, and turn inward from them, and look into the labyrinth'.⁴⁴ And so the pedestrian opens the place of the book to perform somewhere else and make a space there ...

The question remains: why walk if not to arrive? Or, rather, why walk if one wants to arrive? There are other alternatives – a car, a plane, a computer – but it should be apparent by now there are certain pleasures in suspending one's relation to a place, not the least of which is, in Mark Strand's words, 'keeping thing whole'. In an age when the immediacy of arrival has eliminated the journey from much contemporary thought, as evinced by work like Paul Virilio's harrowing vision of telepresence's sedentary interface in a work like *Open Sky* (1997), perhaps the paradigm of the rural walk offers a resistance to the beginnings and ends of things. Perhaps it offers what may be an ecological – as opposed to a technological or utilitarian – performance attentive to the middle that we are always living through. I mean 'ecological' in a temporal as well as spatial sense, because the pedestrian act invests us in the relations between things past and future rather than the presumption of naming the thing in itself. For what is the walk but a tenuous bridge between fugitive islands? As such, to walk is to privilege continual passage while still respecting the striations of places, their histories and the discomfort of our own pedestrian becomings as we stumble about in the space between.

Notes

1. A recent installation piece by Robinson might signal some reconciliation between his sculptural and cartographic trajectories. *Distressed Map of Aran* (2005/2010–present) was a large reproduction on vinyl of Robinson's hand-drawn map that was intended to act as a stage for users' actions and writings. The piece was originally displayed and distressed in 2005 in Cork, and its increasingly weathered surface has been exhibited in a number of settings since.
2. Tim Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara & Other Writings* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1996), 80.
3. For more on the afterlife of performance and how its remains remain, see Rebecca Schneider's *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
4. Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *Eire/Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29.
5. See J. H. Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: the Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).
6. Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores*, 99.
7. *Ibid.*, 19.
8. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 109.
9. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Vol. 1, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 99.
10. *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition.
11. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.
12. *Ibid.*, 118.
13. *Ibid.*, 35.
14. *Ibid.*, 117.
15. Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores*, 162.
16. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these *flâneurs* resisted the birth of commodity culture and its jurisdiction on the movements of individuals by staging their own trajectories through the urban scene, intuitively pursuing transient desires and writing their own critical engagement with the text of the city. For the *flâneur* the city is an opportunity for the self to perform self-reflection. For a good overview of this material, see Anke Gleber's *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). In the 1960s, the Situationist Internationale reinterpreted the *flâneur* as an anti-bourgeois tactic in the notion of the *dérive*.
17. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 103.
18. Minimalism was not a movement per se, but a construct of contemporary art criticism. Most of the artists that were called Minimalists in the 1960s would not have identified themselves as such and many of their individual practices contradict its presumed tenets. See James Meyer's *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
19. 'Art as a formal and holistic description of the real spaces and experience of landscape and its most elemental materials' (2000) reprinted in Paul Moorhouse, *Richard Long: Walking the Line* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 68.
20. Yuko Hasegawa's 'Questions for Richard Long' as quoted in Richard Long, *Richard Long: Circles Cycles Mud and Stones* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum of Houston, 1996), 10. Long would make these repeatable forms his signature work, building circles and lines of stone in remote locations around the world and then photographing them as records of his walks through these particular landscapes.
21. Tim Robinson, *My Time in Space* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2001), 65.
22. *Ibid.*, 66.
23. Tim Robinson, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (New York: Viking, 1986), 11. The dates of these printings and further information on publications can be found at the Folding Landscapes website, <<http://www.foldinglandscapes.com/>>.
24. Karst is bare limestone revealed by erosion into what is known as 'limestone pavement'. Fissures in the rock called 'grykes' divide the stone into lines of

- less eroded rock called 'clints' and cross-hatch the land into an extensive gridwork of joints. Further information and photographs of the area are available from the Clare County Library's website, last accessed on 4 June 2013, <<http://www.clarelibrary.ie>>.
25. Robinson has also written a collection of short stories and most recently completed a trilogy of texts on Connemara.
 26. Robinson, *Stones of Aran*, 13.
 27. Ibid., 44.
 28. Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores*, 5.
 29. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 201.
 30. De Certeau writes of how each place on a map occupies its location proper to itself and only itself: 'It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability' (ibid., 117).
 31. Ibid., 102.
 32. See Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality' in *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1) (1980): 5-27.
 33. Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shore*, 22.
 34. Robinson, *Pilgrimage*, 275.
 35. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 101.
 36. Ibid., 86.
 37. Mark Strand, *Reasons for Moving* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 40.
 38. Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 150.
 39. See Robinson's essay 'The Extreme Edge' in *My Time in Space*, 110-24, and his dream-story, 'Visits to the Black Cliff', in *Tales and Imaginings* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2002), 138-41.
 40. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 57, my italics.
 41. Robinson, *My Time in Space*, 121.
 42. Robinson, *Stones of Aran*, 278.
 43. Ibid., 176, my italics.
 44. Ibid., 282.

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