

Being ready

IT IS ALL ABOUT BEING FLEXIBLE and ready. The walker can draw upon what among contemporary dancers and movement artists are almost banalities now: the prioritising, above technique, of flexibility and preparedness to accept affordances, to respond, to be open and raw to the moment. All the tactics and ideas here do not mean much without such readiness, such pre-expressivity, necessary for spontaneous reaction to what the road throws at you, which is mostly offers.

There is a paradox here: preparing to be spontaneous. Unsurprisingly, this is mostly a *via negativa*; the removal of blocks and inhibitions. It is also creative in a negative way; those blocks and inhibitions sometimes produce useful delays and deferrals. So, simplistic readiness is not enough; what a chosen walking requires is a sophisticated readiness that is strategic, able to translate the immediacy and specificity of the offer from the road to a moving space on a sliding plane of generality: in other words, little things connecting to big things, every brush with the road part of a big picture; a body in flux in co-creation with spaces that are always under construction.

Every time we enter a room or a forest, the walls or the trees bulge very gently towards us and we swell very slightly towards them. All masses attract. Walkers should be like martial artists, using the momentum of the 'enemy' (anything other than themselves) as their primary energy, living off others' supply lines.

In the end there are no rules, but "in the end" does not come around that often. Rules are temporary; susceptible to texture, switches of scale, the invasion of micro-worlds, the slithering of planes, vibrant things, dialogue, decaying of scripts, the collapse of abject public art, the holing of space, the traffic of hubs, voiding, indecision at *plaques tournant*, voiding again, edging land, pseudo-rituals and the invention of modern traditions. Any, or all, of

these can click in at any time. Such is the multiplicity of possibilities that there is no point in trying to learn protocols for every eventuality. All that will suffice is a general preparedness; a readiness to slide down between layers, relaxing into situations, snapping to sharp manipulations. It is something like movement artist Sandra Reeve's 'ecological body': "from a position of 'being among' rather than 'being central to'... they may experience their own system as an intrinsic part of a wider set of systems... rediscovering the flow of environment, rather than the environment as a succession of places". No one can fully mistress this; sometimes everyone's next best guess is all there is. No one is immune to missing a chance or freezing with fear or embarrassment (happens to me all the time), particularly those who "STAY CALM AND..." and those, like me, who are unjustifiably infuriated by them.

There is no justice and no guarantee. The inspired leap of a lazy drifter can leapfrog the assiduous student of Situationist texts, but there is no certainty things will go either way. And yet all my drifting suggests that good fortune favours the sensitive and non-institutionalised. Though be clear; I am playing with benign forces here. I make no claim for any special powers over fascists, authoritarians or sadists; I am far from sure that any of this is immune from manipulation and contortion. At best drifters make themselves invisible, of no interest to the world.

"Y gwyr yn erbyn y byd." ("Truth against the world.")

...on our way to Covehithe, by the lagoons and reedbeds of Benacre Broad, Ivan and I discuss wind turbines and electricity pylons. I like the look of both. Ivan does not, but he is enjoying the view of two wind turbines across the Broad, and wonders at this sudden appreciation of their beauty. I tell him that pylons are so called because they are the shape of pylon portals in the Ancient Egyptian underworld; the National Grid is a tracery of death across the country, the power of Ka racing down the wires. I tell him of the death of Roland Levinsky, Vice-Chancellor at Plymouth University, killed walking his dog on Christmas Day by current leaping from the power line of a fallen pylon.

Ivan talks of Arthur Ransome and George Orwell, both locals, and we discuss their secret service involvements. I tell Ivan how our theatre company unknowingly contrived to billet a former KGB head of station at Istanbul with a serving MI6 officer. Well, if people will keep these things secret, how are you supposed to know?

Ivan speculates on Ransome's response to *Animal Farm*: "you put in Stalin and Trotsky, but where is Lenin?"

Ivan is working on a piece about the Auxiliary Units for a 'What if...' play about what might have happened if the Nazis had invaded England. I first came across the largely unappreciated history of the Auxiliary Units when preparing a mis-guided tour for the small Dorset town of Beaminster. The place had its own covert local terrorist group ready to instigate havoc come a German invasion: torching cars to stop evacuation, garden sheds stocked full of explosives to destroy key bridges and railway tunnels. My question to Ivan is "why this show now?"; Ivan is exercised by the problem of coalitions.

Ivan believes that other citizens would have tried to stop the Units, in order to avoid reprisals from the Germans. Each of the Units comprised a small HQ staff and a number of heavily armed patrols of up to eight men apiece. All the members of these patrols *knew their landscape*. If invasion came the patrols would 'go to ground' for a while, until the enemy had fully overrun their area, only then would they begin to emerge and raise mayhem. "I chose patrol leaders from successful farmers and fruit growers, one a Master of Foxhounds, another a game warden, and encouraged them to nominate their own men." (Captain Andrew Croft.) Friends and relatives as well as employers and employees constituted the teams: tight associations and coalitions. They operated under the guise of the Home Guard, "moving around at night without being seen or heard". They dug Operational Bases (OBs), underground sleeping and hiding areas, ventilated, built of timbers and corrugated iron. Each one supplied with a gallon jar of rum: the necessity of ecstasy, of altered states of consciousness, for the work of resistance. Sten guns, Thompson sub-machine guns, plastic explosives, snipers' rifles. Experiment was encouraged even after one unit set Leiston Common on fire.

The beaches we are walking today were considered likely invasion sites.

Ideal procedure was for no shots to be fired in anger (only explosions) and to take no losses; the Units understood the power of not fighting, of absence, of the army that melts away. The patrol members took a new look at their landscape to determine “which parts might be useful to the enemy”; the “farms, the streams and the woods which had been their playground could soon become their battleground” (Richard Webster); identifying attack and escape routes would have been routine for poachers if they were recruited.

Ivan says he, like me, has heard the Auxiliary Unit rumours: of assassination lists, often with unexpected names (local chiefs of police, and so on) and at the top of all the lists, of course, says Ivan, was the individual who put all the local units together in the first place, the one person who could, willingly or not, expose them all. The Auxiliary Units, with their model cell structure, have provided the blueprint for pretty much every terrorist organisation since. In some way they model ideal features of a drifting group, members of a convivial *dérive*, but there, I’m doing it again, prescribing...

