

Fillings and Findings

By the fourth loop around King's Cross, I was worried that I would forget all the sensations and impressions teeming inside me, the threads and beginnings of thoughts that needed teasing out. All the stuff I wanted to write about might slip out of my brain if I didn't hold tightly to it and record it in my notebook soon. Maybe the things I wanted to remember would be crowded out as new sensations arrived thick and fast with each new step. I felt fuller and fuller. As we neared the underpass, I felt I had to think quickly; peel off and 'download' my thoughts before I forgot them, and then re-join, de-cluttered and free to absorb more. In my imagination, I was a blank slate waiting to be filled and erased and re-filled ad nauseum. Although I have been walking weekly with AIR's walking club* since it started in October, I had always been able to quickly jot my initial thoughts down after the hour - the time scale of Silent Footnotes threw me.

Luckily, I worked through the question in time to make a decision - that isn't how psyches should be used, recording every minute detail a-historically. My psyche is no virgin. Relieved with this insight, I gave myself permission to continue, uninterrupted. It would be impossible to remember everything, some things would ebb out of my memory and would be lost. Those are the ones that aren't mine and that I can't keep. They don't mean as much as the other things and I must let them go.

The image of the blank slate was replaced by an image of being magnetically charged. I would attract the fillings and findings that belong to me, they would gather in bulk as I walked, and I would end the loops, not with nothing, but with the weight of a very particular accumulated insight. It turns out, having walked silently for hours, I now know I am a solar system, not a black hole sucking random objects in. The bright constellation of my subjectivity pulls only some things into its orbit.

About a year ago I gave birth to a son. The reverie of being with my infant runs parallel to the reverie of walking in silence over the same familiar-strange cityscape. I compare the feeling of holding a fussy baby to encountering bits of architecture I think are ugly and wasteful. I don't know what to do immediately with either of them, the obvious hasn't worked or isn't possible, so I don't do much. Often in both cases I continue walking as I think about them. A dense love is under construction,' says Heather Phillipson in a poem about her newborn**. I imagine my own brain changing, synapses firing and wiring, grey matter reorganising and growing as I respond to wails and new concerns like scratchy fingernails that need paring and strange patterns of sleeping and wakefulness. My sensibility of King's Cross as I walk each loop, as I return each week for walking club, increases in density. It thickens like my new-mother synapses upon returning. Reverie is a state of mind that is open to receive both the enjoyable and the difficult from the object of love: the cries and the coos. I am learning how to hear and see not just the well-thought out estate and the magpies as I walk but the stuff I don't know what to do about, or how to change: evidence of gentrification, gross displays of swaggering wealth, flowers for the boy who was killed. I'm not sure where else I have the luxury of listening like this, to consider and not fix immediately, to return - our world is full of (legitimate) demands to give my time and energy and attention.

Where else can I enjoy immersing myself in these evocative pleasures? Certainly not the kind of walking I do usually. Unlike ordinary alone silent walking, the sort I do to work or en route elsewhere, I had no responsibility other than to open myself and see what happened. Tilly and Anna knew the route, I did not, they walked ahead and I followed. There was no need to pay attention to the boring stuff, like road names or directions or points of compass - I was free to receive. The interplay between being opened up in reverie yet limited by what would be personally meaningful fills me with hope. My hunch at the start of the year was that Anna and Tilly were onto something transformational, but I wasn't sure about the mechanics of it. Now I wonder if it points to a way of being that might have political implications. Maybe all this silent walking will turn me into a better activist, better at resisting, better at noticing and conserving and valuing contradictions and difference. t any rate, all this walking, Silent Footnotes, the walking club, offers an unexpected exit out of my private cosmos, a delicious moment of radical openness before ducking back in to my own thoughts.

*King's Cross Walking Club

**Heather Phillipson is a poet and artist introduced to me by Tilly. The poem is called 'At first, the only concern is milk, more or less'. (Insta-flex 2014)

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