

h a u n t

Whirring Down the Capucijnenstraat

by Erik Benjamins

¹ WARM UP — Stretch, squeeze, expand, and roll your feet as you would before yoga or a grand departure. Close your eyes. Imagine the speed and rhythm of a pace to most gracefully participate in the day's responsibilities, surprises, and pleasures.

² A MODEL WALKER — Whirring down the Capucijnenstraat was the vision of a dog walker supreme. She sat in La-Z-Boy repose, her electric wheelchair on patrol, like a tank in the streets. A safety mirror for each side and a white flag out the back. What inspiration! To transform the dutiful ritual of the dogwalk into an opportunity for some easy moving, carefree and unapologetic.

³ GENTLE GUIDE — I'd like to propel you forward as a reading walker, or a walker, reading. This after-dinner walk will be conducted outdoors. You can walk alone, with another, or with many others. Alternatively, find a comfortable, quiet space in your home and take this walk in your mind.

⁴ EAR PLUGS — Have you ever participated in an evening groupwalk with your ears plugged? How startling to move, sense, and learn through a muffled soundscape (exterior) when overwhelmed by the breaths, steps, and joints (interior)! After finishing your meal, begin your walk by plugging your ears and moving into public space (pressing fingers will do). In a direction of your choosing, walk faster than usual for fifteen minutes. The goal is to reintroduce yourself to a familiar place with an unfamiliar sensory perspective.

⁵ THE LISTENING WALKER — Stop and unplug your ears. Without moving your head, (1) listen to the left. Now (2) listen to the right. (3) Listen to the back, and then (4) the space above your head, and finally (5) listen to the front again. Stretch your ears: pull the bottoms, tops, and sides. Repeat the five steps above and resume your walk, this time at a slightly slower pace. Pay particular attention to the 4Ds: direction, distance, dB (volume), duration.

⁶ BUOYANT STEPS — Slow your walk. Believe that each step is bewilderingly generative: your feet are rebounding off the ground with feverish buoyancy and it reverberates through your body, up to the tallest hair!

⁷ A WARM EGG IN A COOL HAND — Continue at a pace of your choosing and walk some contours. For example, walk the perimeter of an apartment complex, the grass's edge in a park, a gas station, a painted safety marker, shadows. Assign your contours temperatures and alternate between warm and cool.

⁸ A WALK AROUND THE GUT — Across her travels, Gabrielle Hamilton got to know every contour of her hunger. She writes that it grew so specific that she could name every corner and fold: salty, warm, brothy, starchy, fatty, sweet, clean and crunchy, crisp and watery.

⁹ STEPS AS BITES — Imagine each step as a bite. Walk as many steps as it would take for you to become comfortably full.

¹⁰ REST

¹¹ CORNERS & FOLDS — Did you take time for a break? Continue your walk under the influence of your stomach. Swing your arms as a hungry walker, and then as a full walker. Try other variations with your head, knees, and belly.

¹² BODY PRESSURE — Concentrate on tension in the muscles. Pain where bones meet, fleshy deformations that occur under pressure; consider body hair, perspiration, odors (smells).

¹³ CALLIGRAPHY PRACTICE — In Chengdu, I was averaging seven miles a day on foot. The hard stares at my fresh Nikes were more distracting than the stressed muscles at each day's end. One afternoon, a man practicing his brushwork at People's Park stopped me mid-walk to ink in water on the ground: a group of elderly ramblers passed by our front door on the way to their hearth.

¹⁴ TO DRAG, TO DROP — The Drag and Drop politely disrupts the conventions and expectations of a guided walk. Along the walk, the guide drops walkers off, one by one, at various sites and they're left alone to wait, watch, and be retrieved. I'm going to leave you here. Stay as long as you'd like and when you're ready, resume your walk as you see fit. You are encouraged to repeat past steps from our walk or create new ones.

¹⁵ SUNDAY SAUNTERERS — And other descriptors: raucous ramblers, mild meanderers, crosswalkers and catwalkers, students of swagger.

NOTES — This walk has been realized under the influence of the author's participation in *The Drive of Walking* masterclass, held at the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, Netherlands from 9 to 16 September, 2016. Led by Yeb Wiersma and David Helbich, we sought to explore the poetics and practicalities of walking as it collided into artistic practice. Footnotes 5 and 14 reference exercises by David Helbich; no. 8 references Gabrielle Hamilton's 2011 chef memoir, *Blood, Bones, & Butter*; no. 13 quotes Bruce Nauman's 1974 performance score, *Body Pressure*.

† As an artist, writer, and educator, Los Angeles-based Erik Benjamins celebrates the sensing body as a means to move in the world. His practice is concept-driven, materially unfaithful, and unapologetically optimistic. From an experimental Florentine travel memoir to custom scented candles to a vanishing cookbook, Erik employs tenets of performance, namely a sensitivity to duration, body-to-body empathy, and a sensory spectatorship. Language and writing are also integral to the research, production, and installation of his work. Lately, he’s explored both the tourist and the homebody as privileged identities with which to learn from another. Erik has recently exhibited at the University Art Gallery at UC Irvine in the two-person exhibition “Who Gets to Look”, curated by Virginia Arce and at the Institute for Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles. He has participated in a masterclass on walking at the Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, Netherlands and has recently finished a residency at Spring Workshop in Hong Kong.
<http://erikbenjamins.com/>

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Address:

Haunt Journal of Art

Department of Art

Claire Trevor School of the Arts

University of California, Irvine

3229 Art Culture and Technology

Irvine, CA 92697-2775

Email:

hauntjournal@uci.edu

Website:

www.hauntjournal.org

http://escholarship.org/uc/uciart_hauntjournal

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