

Pre-amble

The work I present here is a kind of soundwalk, a central practice in the field of Acoustic Ecology. It is meant to be downloaded onto a mobile device and listened to while walking.

It is a guide to an internal attitude as much as to an external landscape, so the walk may be undertaken in any environment, urban or rural.

This piece is the confluence of a number of different creations by other people. I was prompted by the Emergence project to reflect on the role of art in leadership. This led me to a poem by Antoine de Saint-Exupery called 'Dessine-moi un bateau' which might be translated thus:

Make me a Boat

If I communicate to my men
The love of sailing on the sea,
Then you will see them soon diversifying
According to their thousand particular qualities:
That one will weave the canvas,
Another in the forest will fell the tree,
Another still will forge nails
And there will be some who observe the
Stars and learn to steer,
And yet all will be only one.
To create the ship,
Is not to weave the canvas,
To forge the nails,
To read the stars,
But rather to give a taste for the sea.

Another influence was the musings on sustainability of one of the most sophisticated machines ever imagined, the Replicant Roy Batty in *Blade Runner*.

The biggest influence on this piece, however, was a six-day expedition I undertook as part of the Emergence Summit in September 2012. Designed by Simon Whitehead, *Land Journey* scattered about forty walkers over an area from the peak of Cadair Idris to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and it included a number of surprise interventions by local people. The first and last of these was by the artist Ben Stammers who, in a couple of enigmatic and haunting actions, abandoned himself to the river.

Apart from a short extract during which some strains of Vangelis can be heard through the rain, the only musical instrument used here is the harmonica that Ben Stammers had finished with, and which I caught from the bridge as he was swept away beneath.

A Taste for the Sea

a guided tour of anywhere you like

This is an audio tour, a kind of guided contemplation, which requires active participation on your part. You cannot merely imagine it. It will require some time during which you do not speak, read or write, and it will require that you go outside with some means of listening to this recording while walking.

This recording is only part of my composition. My gift is the sound you are in. You should go to an unenclosed, public space. Whether urban or rural, it should be somewhere you can wander until you are not quite sure where you are. You could drive to a distant wilderness or you could just step outside your front door but there should be open space ahead of you.

As you walk, options will present themselves. Possible directions will fan out before you. Different voices will call you. When you next have an opportunity to make a decision, surprise yourself. When you notice an opportunity to turn either right or left, to step on this spot or that one, pay attention to the different pulls. Listen for the quieter voice. This is an invitation to make a space in time, to create a wilderness in your busy life.

Play this recording in small sections, then switch it off and walk, listening to the air around you, for at least ten minutes or longer.

Keep walking and listening to where you are.
When your mind starts wandering resume the recording.

During this space I have made for you, you might choose to draw a line with your walking, a line not pushed by the pressures of habit and society, but drawn by the deepest gravity.

Allow a song line to be drawn out of you.
As you walk under the open sky be aware of the density of your bones.
Allow yourself, even from a mountain top, to feel the immensity of the sea.

On this walk you are the leader .
Time passes inexorably but every moment is a crossroad.
Every step is a new choice. You are at the tip of a new path. You are the growing radicle of a plant, the first drop of a river.

You might feel, as you walk and walk, that a sea change is coming.
And in the face of a mountainous sea you might choose to build
Either a wall or a ship.

A wall can be built alone but for a ship you will need help.
If you want the help of others there is no point in ordering them about.
Your best hope is to let them smell the sea.

A distant trickle, almost like a synth tone

As you walk words may grow in you
Let these words have earth clinging to their roots.
Let them still flap and glisten with river water
When you dredge them up.

Let the words have the contours of hills.
And let them still ring
With the nothing that was here
Before the buildings rose and will be here
After the streets are submerged.

a long harmonica note, like a sine wave

A body is drifting downstream
It is dressed in the blue overalls
Of a labourer
It is not swimming but undulating like a weed
Like a melody blown across reeds

As if he were a father leaving his estate
Before wading into mid-stream,
A girl stepped off his shoulders
To stroll upstream along the bank
Lilting to the mountain flank

The water has reached my eyes
And my vision is washed until all is sea
And I do not know whether to be or not.
To sink to the end or stride to the top.

She has kept his harmonica safe
Like a baton in the folds of her dress.
Leaving an heirloom song and pilot fish arrow
He has dissolved into the world's marrow

As you slip loose of the cities
The hills rise up to greet you
And bathe you in green.
A million greens

As you escape from the wilds
The city welcomes you with lights
And gathers around you
Humming a million greys

And among the waifs you meet Sabrina
Separated from her sisters
Ystwyth and Varga, the water nymphs
Who had all resolved, on the mount of Plynlimon
To find their way back to their mother, the sea.
But Sabrina, after stepping down from her father's shoulder,
had played too long in the reeds
and was drowned by men in Llyn Clywedog.
Dammed by them to a reservoir.
See her now, peaceful as Ophelia, flowers in her pale hands,
water streaming off her face for the bathtubs of Birmingham.

A river is a story
Gathering up the world and carrying it to its conclusion.

The river gets carried away with itself
borne away by the surprise of its own unfolding.

A river deposits its findings as sediments that rise up to form the bones of new
civilizations.

Wave after wave after wave.
The mountain you walk on was once a sea and the sea will be a mountain range.
What's the point of all this?

The point of a river is the mountain top
The sharp drop
From which it spreads,
A finger of water touching the sky.

The point of a river is a single drop.
A single you who when you grow
Will be a stream enterer.
As surely as each raindrop grows to become a line.

The point of a river is to get to the sea
It needs no convincing
Demands no graphs and maps

And I do not ask you now for help
Just as you do not reason with a dog
But let it smell and give it love.

Walk on water and let your walking soak you.
Until you see the sea

Walk like a river
Letting your feet splash through the restless waves of your thoughts.
Beneath which they run with no ripples.

Just walk,
Until you sink to the slow water of the bed, which is as still as the earth.
Keep walking until it is clear
That your wishes and fears are no more true than the sky and the ground.
Walk until you run out of running.

Your future may be dashed against a rock, washed up on mud,
lost in mists, or floating in heavenly clouds.
Your detailed plans are as irrelevant as rain.

Each drop can only obey the laws of gravity.
The sea emerges from the river's devotion.

As you walk, simultaneously listen to all the sounds you are bathed in and focus your attention on your moving body.

There is a way to extend your awareness by imagining any part of the body and how it might feel. You can make a determined journey to a specific location to explore and understand it. Your mind is then forced into the gaps, feelings flushed or squeezed out in some way, awareness extended into a hitherto dead space where you know it should be.

But there is also another way. To just be where you are, noticing this place,
Staying close to the feeling as it is
And growing it from the dim edges
In the way that a plant grows through the radical,
Tingling out into the darkness, expanding towards the light.

Perhaps in this second way there is a danger of stagnation,
Wallowing in familiarity, forgetting to learn, forgetting to grow the awareness,
forgetting to keep moving towards the subtle, to keep growing from the edge.
But as long as curiosity is still alive, it is more fun, more relaxed.
It's the way a river flows, never knowing whether the next moment will be an
eddy in a pool or a sheer precipice. Ready to fall into any space.

Walking, you could pick a destination you want to get to, and then stride forth
until you get there. Or climb and climb to beat back the horizon.
But the horizon will always win. Before you reach it you will run out of time.

So, instead, you could just keep moving, stay alert, and let the whole world come
to you in its own rhythms.

Then, going nowhere in particular, things comes closer and closer to you, rolling
beneath your feet, unfolding around you, touching your skin, entering your
breath, until you are no longer walking to a place but swimming in it.
And then even the effort of swimming drifts away and shoals of fish move
through you, and you are held and bathed.

The body is the base of the mind and its space.
There is no other context or support.
Though looking from the bank you might be easily confused
When you step in it's obvious:
The mind and the body are the surface and the depths of the same river.

Keep moving your body. Let it walk. Be aware of its many parts.
Instead of thinking *at* the body,
Directing a beam of thoughts from your head to your limbs,
Allow the body *itself* to think and feel in all its myriad locations.
It is a city of activity. A forest.
A constellation of voices calling from hoardings and shop fronts and signals
From crannies and clouds and aches.

Let the will emerge from the multitude.
Let pelvis, skin and sadness
Share their space with the drifting fog of forgetfulness,
The sudden twinge of muscle, and the idea of love.
And let all these rise in a clamour until a crescendo swells through them all
Like a breaker
On which surfs, not just you, but everything there could ever be.

Let the city steadily rise up to drown the quiet hills.
Let the hills be the bodies of sleeping men.

Let your old body drift from your new body like smoke.
Let the rain evaporate from your skin, leaving you dessicated.

Walking, let your body remember its old rhythms, its family dances.
Remember the shelter it was trapped in until now,
Walled with possessions.
Even now, what does it really need?

His harmonica was a leaping silver fish
A talisman
A baton and a boat

His harmonica was a blade of silver cutting the wind
Cutting, when caught, a valley into the soft palm of his child.

A farmer whets the shears with his tears
Crying with his sheep as he notches their ears
For what he has given up and bears
By the sons of fathers for years and years and years.

Even through traffic and noise your body might feel the gravity of the sea.
Even through tarmac you might hear the aquifer roaring in your blood.
And even through blustering winds, taste the river's licking of pebbles.

Then your body is held differently by the space around it.
When you walk like water the earth erodes to embrace you.
She reveals herself in views you had never imagined,
Which were prepared to wait here for ever.

This street corner is a mysterious glade.
This opening is a meeting place.
It has been here since the beginning,
Inhabited by the forgotten dreams of town planners
Or the desires of circling winds.
Its light has a colour.
Time hangs here for a moment before moving on.
The spirits of insects flit through it.

The railway lines make banks like a glacial gorge.
Water draws lines over aeons
Streets slice through a million lines of thought.

The flat fronts rising up are a craggy face standing against the weather
slapped and stroked without pause.
And there are living cultures and colonies everywhere, flowering into visibility at
the slightest opportunity.

Spores, germs and seeds hang like ghosts in the air, waiting for the slightest substrate to be born onto.
The ancient land constantly seeps through the screen of the city.

The river is here whether you see it or not, swirling into bus driver, car or tramp,
into tree and bird and hill.

Learn the quality of river water
To tumble and bubble even through the city's slopes.
Sky and ground are here too, even in the thick of civilization.
Despite the most fevered sterilizations, insects grow from cracks.
Amidst the tightest arrest on beauty
Moulds measure time.
Life seeps through the screen.

Yet the clamorous profusion of things is everywhere infused by a deep silence.

Let yourself fall like rain into the folds of the wilderness.

Hear, in running water,
See, in the constantly changing light,
Echoes and reflections of what was present before you came
And will be present after you, and all your concerns, have gone.

Continue through the majesty of the mountain with your small crawl.
Creep towards the sea until you are swimming.

The sea is not a distant dream.
It is here now.

And as the world warms it engulfs us.
Open the sails of your arms to embrace this edge
And embark as Noah did.

Here is the sea
We're in it

Your ship is a castle in the air
Architecture rising from the wild
A solidity in the surge

If architecture is calligraphy on the page of the earth,
then the ship is a song in the swirling noise
A tune in the churning current
A gift to one another
Carrying a cargo to the very end of the world.

Walk over the edge now.
Wade through waves.
And let your body listen.
The patterns of interference that are so exhausting to track
Are simple to feel.
Trying to understand it all you might just give up in confusion
Or chase after mirages until you die.
Instead be flotsam in the great ocean gyres.
Let them pass through you and slake all your thirsts and wash you clean.

Keep walking.
Don't linger anywhere or hold on.
Don't try to remember anything. Let it go.
Whatever you try, soon it will be gone

The world is the world's memory.
There's no need, after all, to clasp it to yourself.
It answers it's own queries.

Like a grate in the flow
You might catch the bits that rush past
Sculpting your body as a coral reef does,
Creating cities of knowledge in you
Ready to welcome those with divers needs.

Or you may let the particles erode you
As the sea washes continents.
And, becoming cell by cell clear of all impediments,
Let all currents play through you.

Then the ocean answers the ocean
Its tides and temperatures,
The scribbles of constellations on its ripples,
Recording the tears of every civilization in the rain.

His harmonica was the call of the mountain eagle and the seagull
I taste it now in my mouth.

This is as far as we can go together.
I must take my shoes off and bury myself in the current

We must part company.
But I will leave you with something.

A pinch of salt
A flash of silver,
A fish in the air,

Here –
Catch!