



Walk my words

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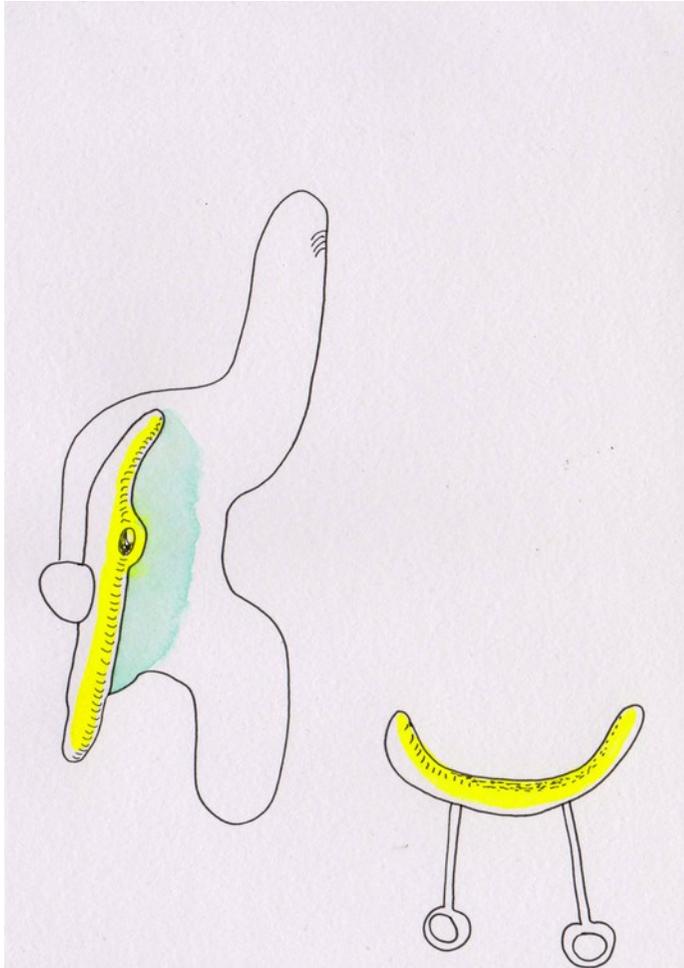
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Part 1

The walk



1. The bridge

The words are getting nervous. They want to go out for a walk. One even starts to hiss, another makes scratching sounds. I put all of them in my mind and try not to stumble when I open the door. *Key key key!* That word is small but very important. Sometimes it hides and brings me into trouble, but this time it decided to be visible and bounces helpfully up and down in front of me. Outside, I can see my breath. *Atemwolke!* The German words usually are the fastest. After a few steps I reach the bridge.

Swan? Plastic bag? Strömung! Dark waters. Please behave, I am uttering. I know that bridges excite them. They lose contact with the earth a bit. They want to stay and look at the water's movement and at the same time they want to jump and run.

A bear and a rat are making a fire in the middle of the bridge.

The bear approaches me.

"Have you seen my socks?" I nod.

"I made a sculpture out of them recently, wearing them as a hat", I answer. *Bruxelles... the swan by night...* Ssht, words, please give the two a chance to talk.

"Oh, that is cheeky. But I forgive you".

The bear offers me a roasted sausage and I accept immediately. *Bratwurst!* All of a sudden the rat addresses me, looking slightly worried.

“Is my being filled with serenity?”

“I think so”, I answer, smiling. – “Otherwise you would not be here right now.”

He looks relieved. “Am I one of the chosen?”

“Yes, of course, together with Bear.”

They go on with their questions, and after some time I notice that they don't really need answers. They need questions.

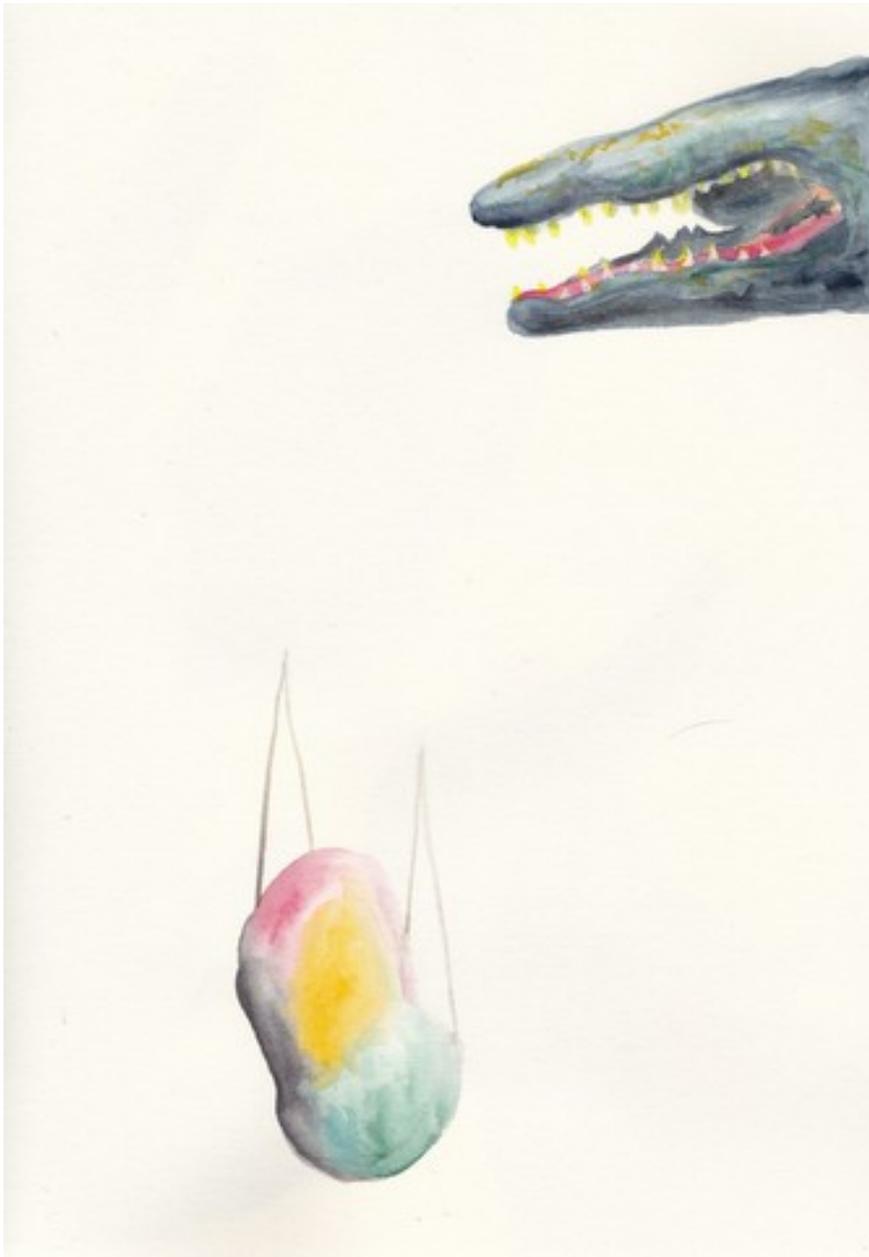
“Can I re-establish my innocence?”, the rat goes on.

“To a certain extent yes, but only if you forget that you did it.”

My reflex to answer is faster than my freshly gained knowledge. The two don't mind. I start to ask things as well. Sometimes they respond, but more often we laugh or stare thoughtfully at the water flowing beneath us.

Finally I move on. The words are dancing. I don't pay attention to the road ahead of me so much because I am dancing silently with them.

There was this dream about flying... just find the right combination of steps. Or a cannonball.



2. The clouds

Ta-tata-ta-tata-dam, and up I go. *Flieger, gruess mir die Sonne*, the words are singing excitedly. I come across our friend, the green parakeet. He is always busy.

"Where do you go?", he asks me, fluttering nervously.

"I am looking for Hans. Do you know him? Hans Arp? Maybe he calls himself Jean."

"Oh yes, Hans. The one who said that he was born in the clouds? He is there, right above the playground. Just fly straight up and you will find him. I have to go. Bye!"

"Bye! And thank you!" – I have to shout, because he is already far away again.

When I find Hans, he is busy writing something. He does not seem to be disturbed by my arrival and offers me a seat on a puffy cloud.

„I wanted to tell you that you are not forgotten down on earth. We still listen to your voice reading your poem 'Die Wolkenpumpe'. Only our daughter is a bit afraid of some violent images in it.“

„I would love to create children as vases with umbilical cords.“, he replies.

„Maybe your sculptures are your children. I heard some friends of yours declaring that your work suggested the maternal. That your rhythms are that of rocking, an eternal tenderness.“, I answer.

„weisst du die kunst ist ein schwarzes loch, in jedem loch ist eine wolke.“ He switches to German.

Kein Problem. Muttersprache. Indeed, words.

„Alright. Of course you are also a dadaist pur sang.“

„I am the great ABC.“, he says straight-faced.

„Well, actually I am, too.“ I reply quickly.

He comes closer to me and whispers in my ear:

„Everything which is written can also be rewritten.“

„Yes. Especially if you write as a sort of association-machine you might even desire a process which keeps revolving.“ I think out loud. „Your sculptures however look very much wrapped up in themselves and finished.“

He looks very serious now. „That is because my life flows into their body. I feel it when there is nothing more to change and only then I give it a name.“

„So then your process comes to a halt?“

„Well, often some detail like a curve or a contrast in one of my sculptures moves me and becomes the germ of a new work...“

„Oh, I recognize that!“, I exclaim.

All of a sudden Hans is distracted by a cloud floating along our heads.

„weisst du niemand kann mir nachweisen dass ich nicht ein adler bin.“ He continues to write and nods vaguely into my direction. Slightly astonished by this abrupt end of our conversation I stand up, get to the edge of a large cloud, sway and jump. My heart is beating fast.



3. The playground

A bit wobbly I land on my feet. I will practice how to come down again. Where am I? Oh yes, at the playground. *Cache-cache... tikkertje... pak me dan, als je kan! Un bel gioco dura poco.* My words speak out of experience, they know both sides – the language of the child and the one of the parents.

Schnurrbart? Schmusen? Vorremo fare le fusa... They are longing to meet Franz West. A while ago, they told me in confidence that they want to build a nest in his moustache. I guess the playground is a good place to stumble upon him. I start to look closely. The slide – no. The seesaw? Neither. A girl is sitting on the swing, gently humming. No sign of Franz.

A bit further away, I detect a long sculpture lying in the grass. *Sitzwurst.* Psst, words! A man is lying on it. Coming closer, I notice that he is a bit translucent. When he sees me, he gets up and greets me.

„Servus!“

„Hello! May I sit next to you?“ All of a sudden I am a bit shy.

„Of course. Do you like my Qwertz?“

„Your Qwertz?“

„Yes, the sculpture you are sitting on.“

„Oh yes, definitely. It is very inviting.“

He smiles and looks satisfied.

„Franz, may I ask you something? It might be a bit strange.“

„The stranger, the better!“

„Ok then. There are some words of mine who would love to nestle in your moustache. Only for a little while.“

„Hoppala!“

„Please.“

„That is indeed a bit strange.. But yes, let's do it!

My moustache is ready. How does it work?“

I come closer. Really close. I could touch his laughter lines.

I part my lips and whisper six words which jump, sustained by my breath, onto his moustache. He looks at me in surprise.

„That tickles! But in a pleasant way. They may stay as long as they wish.“

Only a keen observer could see the slight movement they produce. It might as well come from a light breeze.

„Thank you very much.“



4. The supermarket

With a big smile I say good-bye to Franz and go to the supermarket. It is the one with the big and friendly Turkish owner who never leaves his places behind the cash desk. Maybe he is friends with the swimming teacher I know who never comes out of the water.

Merhaba, kuzu kuzu. Unut beni. My words want to show that they still remember the time I lived in Berlin. But I don't let them come out of my mouth, because they don't make sense. They are only crumbs, snatches of a possible conversation.

In the corner with frozen fish I bump into Mark Manders.

„Aren't you -“

„Hush! I am here incognito.“

„Oh, sorry. Why?“

„I am testing an artwork. See if it can survive here.“

He is pointing towards the freezer. A tail is the only thing I can see. The rest of the sculpture is hidden under the freezer.

„It is the fox and the mouse, isn't it? Haven't you already tested that sculpture in Venice?“ I turn towards him again, but he is already gone.

Shoes. Yes, words, he is the one who once said that shoes have an entrance for the night when they are not worn. He definitely is a poet, be it a pretty shy one.

I pay for my pack of batteries – the wrong ones, I learn afterwards - and leave the shop. „Dag buurvrouw!“ The shop owner calls everyone neighbour. In Dutch, do you hear that, words?



5. The park

Whatever will be, will be... The words pay me back for my remark about the shop owner's greeting. They know exactly how to trigger old, irritating earworms. *The future's not ours to see...* I try not to listen. Instead, I enter the park. I am looking forward to see the three fountains in the lake performing their splashing water ballet.

When I sit down on a bench nearby, a man is coming closer. A wild man. Without saying a word, he sits next to me. *Schnappviech?* I don't know of what kind he is, words. His teeth are sharp and his fur is full of matted spots. Another wild man joins us. He is wearing a costume out of straw and colourful ribbons.

Karneval? Fasching? My words make clicking sounds. No, that is over already, isn't it? Without addressing me, the men get up after a while and go away. A third man approaches me.

„χαίρε.“

„Sorry, I don't speak your language.“, I answer.

„No problem. I know all the languages. May I sit here?“

„Yes, feel free. Have a seat.“

„You are not afraid?“

„No. Should I?“

„Well, most people are – if they can see me.“

All of a sudden, I shiver a bit, and the tiny hairs on my skin start to rise. I don't know if the unknown man's breath is warm or cold. *Vorsicht, stai attenta* - my words are on the watch. He sits down next to me. His cheeks are remarkably round and the long garment he is wearing floats over the park bench.

„My name is Aeolus. I am the ruler of the wind.“
I cannot help myself and stare at him in disbelief, but then I realize that it is not very polite to do so. I bow my head. A breeze lets me lift my chin again.
„It is a great honour for me to meet you!“ *Knicks! Wirbelwind! Velificato!* My words sputter, they are in awe as well, and they forget their resentment. Aeolus ignores my admiration graciously and goes on.

„I happened to pass by here today, and I heard that you have got relatives on one of the islands which carry my name and where I used to live eons ago.

„You mean Lipari? That is true. Unfortunately, my aunt died a couple of years ago.“

„I know“, he answers gently. „But their hotel is still there. Il Gattopardo now is run by her children. Why don't you go there this Summer? We could meet there and I could offer you refreshing breezes with the help of my *Aurae*.“

„Oh Aeolus, but it has been ages since I last met them. And even if I am always longing for Italy, this Summer might be reserved for Helsinki.

„Helsinki?“ He raises an eyebrow, but does not inquire further. „Do you enjoy the sea wind here in your city?“ he switches the subject abruptly. I shuffle around on the bench. Hopefully I haven't annoyed him.

For sure it is not clever to mess with a god. *Für immer Gegenwind!* Oh words, please. I am already nervous enough. I hesitate for a moment. Again, I tell the truth, I can't help it.

„To be honest, I find it too cold and sharp sometimes. It blows sand in my eyes on the beach or makes my hands become cold. But yes, in general it is interesting for me to work with it because of the movement it gives to some of my sculptures.“

„Ah!“ Luckily, he looks quite pleased. „Always good to have friends in the arts. Now excuse me please, I promised someone to give him a bag of wind. Good-bye, dear.“

„Good-bye!“ I shout into the whirlwind which manifests itself besides me and goes up into the air.

I jump up from the bench, my hair dancing in all directions. The three fountains drizzle tiny waterdrops around. I breathe a sigh of relief. Time to go to my studio.



6. The Studio

It is not far from here. It is changing. It is a huge space in a former school, it is a timeless bubble at the academy, it is the kitchen table. A room in my head, the space around me when I am outside, walking. I imagine it to be at the sea in the future.

Lie down, Nickerchen, een tukje... my words are tired and want to loosen up in the dream mode. They try to convince me. There is this soft blanket lying around for moments like this. But then I detect something which was not in my studio before. Two human-sized white round forms are standing close to the window. Who put them there?

„I did.“ A man enters the space and for a second I am afraid. I am not fond of intruders.

„May I introduce myself? I am Ernesto from Brasil.“

Saudade, remember? I try to ignore my words. They fly back to Berlin, into a night which lasted months and is long past now.

The man looks kind, and I am not so afraid anymore.

„Hello and welcome. Why are you here, if I may ask?“

„You called me.“

„Did I?“ I try to grab a word by the sleeve, but it scurries off.

„Yes. You wanted to know more about a portuguese word, *sacanagem*.“ I knew it! They invited him behind my back.

But I am curious. „Ok, please tell me.“

„With pleasure. But first please take a seat.“ He makes an inviting gesture towards the huge soft eggs and shows me how to get into them. For a second or two, I fall into a white pleasant void. I smile, and he smiles back, half sitting, half lying in his sculpture.

„So what is sacanagem?“, I ask him.

„It is the moment which comes after flirting.“, he replies. I try to look neutral. I like the flow of his English which still keeps the Brazilian melody.

„When our faces turn into something else because the erotic charge is so high. When our bodies move to each other.“

„The word I did not know.“, I answer a bit too self-consciously while I move slightly in my pliant shell.

Welcome - I hear a gentle whisper in my head. Sacanagem will live there amongst some other nearly untranslatable words I have learnt by now.

„I want my work to be sacanagem without talking about it.“, Ernesto continues.

„Well, if I saw for instance this work we are inhabiting now somewhere else, I would feel attracted to it immediately.“, I admit. He looks satisfied.

„I don't understand why so many sculptures may not be touched.“, Ernesto goes forth. I nod supportingly.

„I want my sculptures to be bodies or at least to be as close to that as possible. And as such, they may be touched.“

„I like that“, I answer, snuggling deeper into his sculpture.

Sex is like a snake, it slithers through everything.

Where does this sentence come from all of a sudden?

I did not think that. With a frown I look at Ernesto.

„Did you say something?“

He shakes his head. Yet there lies something in his smile which makes me feel unsure.

„Don't your sculptures get damaged by the visitors touching or wearing them, or even lying in or walking on them?“

„Yes, sometimes. Every now and then they receive kisses.

Some have lip prints on them. But that is not a problem at the end.“ He beams.

You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss..., my words make me hum. Nearly. Oh no, this is too old-fashioned romanticism!

And it has nothing to do with my visitor - only with an imprinted idea of love from long time ago, before I even had received my first kiss. I swallow the song down and we start to talk about gravity and how to overcome it.

When he leaves, the infamous guest gap occurs. The visitor's energy still seems to linger around, which makes the notion of his absence stronger. My studio looks empty and my thoughts stray around.

I decide to go outside again in order to get some fresh air. What I have not expected is the fog.



7. Lost

After a few streets I am lost. I kick a stone in order to do something. Where am I? I am bad at determining wind directions and compasses don't serve me. A cool waft of mist is coming from what very possibly is the direction of the sea. I forgot.

Seltsam im Nebel zu wandern. Leben ist Einsam sein. My words know their classics. Ok, words, if you start with Hesse, please give me a more optimistic line. *Und jedem Abschied wohnt ein Zauber inne, der uns beschützt und hilft zu leben.* Ah, slightly better. A tiger is vanishing behind a tree, I don't see him coming out on the other side.

I start to forget streets I wandered through in cities I lived in. Housenumbers are jumping in front of my eyes. *Rue Moris? Bunsenstrasse!* I can't remember the name of the street in Rome anymore where I lived for a short while. But I can at least recall the huge terrace with the scent of citrus trees I was allowed to visit every now and then.

„Chin up!“ I hear a voice and see a hand reaching towards me through the fog. Without thinking, I take it. It belongs to a woman with thick grey hair which still shows that it had been dark before. „Come and walk with me for a short while.“ „But where do we go? And who are you?“

„We will visit the borders. And I am Amy.“ I trust her immediately. She could be a family friend, even if I never met her before. I follow her, untangling my hand cautiously from hers. „Did you turn the wrong way?“, she asks me.

„I don't know if it is wrong. All of a sudden I was lost. I feel awkward, like there is a layer of frost and blindness around me.“ I am a bit ashamed of my spontaneous confession. „Awkward? That is good. The word comes from an Old Norse word, afugr, which means 'turned the wrong way'. And in Middle English, 'awk' is backwards, clumsy.“ „Hm. But why is this good?“ I ask. I don't quite get her.

We stop walking and she looks at me. „This is exactly the state of mind for making a painting or another work of art. This ambivalence, this feeling of being stuck is good. You are alone with the uncertain future of the artwork which probably will be loveable, but also fallible.“

„You mean we are stuck before we start something new? And we try to get it right in the process?“ „Well, or wrong in an interesting way.“ „Is this one of the borders? Between right and wrong?“ „Yes.“ „And the others?“ „Between funny things and sad ones. Figuration and abstraction. Drawing and painting. There are many other borders to look at and to cross.

But let me ask you something. You can see me, can't you?“

„Yes, true. You are close enough.“

„Ok. So let's sit down here on this bench and I will show you a bunch of drawings on my phone.“ There is a bench indeed, I did not notice it before.

„Don't try to guess from whom they are, that does not matter now. I will give every drawing a verb. And you will enter the zone.“

„Isn't it a bit chilly to sit here in the fog?“ I ask. She rummages around in her handbag.

„Here you are.“ She wraps a big and cosy shawl over my shoulders.

„Thank you.“ Now I am ready.

She starts with her slideshow. Numerous images pass by, and with her dark and calm voice she adds the words she has chosen to go with them. „To draft. To shame. To spatialize. To mesmerize...“

It works. „To imagine. To express. To estrange...“

After a while I feel a tickle in my fingers. My gaze is turning towards the infinite and I don't care anymore if I can see the forest for the trees or not. „To liquify. To blow up. To shine...“ The desire to just go with the flow and start to work arises.

„Amy, it helps!“, I exclaim.

„I know.“ She smiles whimsically. „Mazel tov!“

„Thank you so much.“ I take her hand again and press it.

And while I am smiling back, the fog starts to lift and in the distance I see a huge bird rising into the sky.

We get up from the bench.

„The sun is back!“ Every time the sun beams intensify and warm my skin I want to go to the beach.

„I will go to the sea. Do you want to join me?“, I ask her.

„Next time. Now I will go back to work.“

„Ok, sure. It was a pleasure to meet you.“

„The pleasure was all mine.“ We give each other a hug and our paths divide.



8. The Sea

When I arrive at the beach, my words want to be shouted against the waves. I understand them. So I go to the floodline and do what they want. *Thálatta! Sapore di sale...* The wind carries them over the midnight green water, and some fall onto the waves' foaming whitecaps.

„The sea is alive.“ Someone is talking to me. I turn around and see an old woman with a girdle of flowers in her hair. She is doing a little dance. When I look twice, she has turned into a girl, maybe seven or eight years old. A blink later she is old again. A shapeshifter, I am thinking in awe. I have never met one before. Switching between shapes of different ages to me seems even more special.

„I am Tove.“

„Hi Tove. Tove Jansson, right? I am happy to meet you. I only read you before.“

„That is good. So I can stay immortal. Do you think a storm is coming?“

„I hope not.“

„I do. I like adventures! A storm might bring me another iceberg. And then I would not only throw a torch into its grotto. I would jump on it. This time I would dare.“

„Well, Tove, I don't think this is the right place for icebergs to pop up.“

Sea sparkle! Yes, words, not so long ago we have been looking for sea sparkle because we were invited to do so. We searched for it here at the northern shore, where sea sparkle does not occur.

Thank you for reminding me. I won't restrain this woman-girl.

„On the other hand, in view of all this climate change... maybe it actually could happen.“ I hurry to add.

„Oh yes. I can wait! In the meantime I will let my words grow.“

„Really? How does that work?“ I feel that my words are listening very carefully.

“Explosion is a beautiful word and a very big one.“, she answers.

„Later I learned others, the kind you can whisper only when you're alone. Inexorable. Ornamentation. Profile. Catastrophic. Electrical. District Nurse. They get bigger and bigger if you say them over and over again. You whisper and whisper and let the word grow until nothing exists except the word.“

„Very interesting. I will try that one day if I know which word I want to be that big. Thank you, Tove.“

„You're welcome.“

Out of the dunes a black cat is coming towards us.

„Psipsina! Come, dance with me.“, Tove is saying with delight. " She picks the cat up and is swaying gently with her in the rhythm of the sound of the waves.

The cat does not seem to care about the shapeshifting and stays patiently in the arms of its owner.

It is time to go, and I let them stay in their oblivious dance.

When I am already at the top of the dunes, I take a last look.

They are still there, and close to the horizon I believe I can see something green and white and sparkling.



9. The garden

Did that flower pick another one and drink out of its calyx?
I lie down and put my ear to the ground in order to hear
the world's humming. I only had to take the path downwards
from the dunes to reach the garden.

When I raise my head again, a woman with dark eye make-up
is looking at me. I have not seen her before. She comes closer,
her curls are moving slightly in the wind.

„Do you know the code?“ She asks me.

“Yes, I do.“ 2103! - Shht, words, no need to prove it or say it
out loud.

„Then I can give you some onions“, she goes on. With a smile,
she grabs into a huge bag of yellowish onions and gives me two
handfuls. Their dry skins produce a feeble sound when they are
rubbing against each other in my palms.

I thank her.

„Don't forget to put them with the right direction into the ground,
roots showing downwards.“

„Of course“, I mumble. I hear some geese fighting behind us.

And I notice that the ground is moving slightly at the spot where
the woman is standing. Its colour changes from burnt umber to
phtalo green, orange, magenta and Prussian blue.

„How do you do that?“ I ask her, flabbergasted.

„Stop motion, darling.“

„Who are you?“

„I am Allison from L.A. I heard you need some onions,
so I flew over.“

„Actually, I am not so much into onions, but thank you anyway.“

„Are you sure you do know the code?“ She frowns.

„O-n-i-o-n-s...! 24 skins per second... You can plant them closely
together.“

I am confused.

„Never mind. It takes years to understand. I see that you are
a beginner. So a handful should be alright to start with.

Good luck!“ And with a swirling maelstrom she is melting and
vanishing into the ground, but still manages to stick a hand
out of the heap of colour in order to give me a thumb up.

I sway, leaving my hand up in the air until she is gone.

Then I plant the onions, one by one and close to each other.

That will be alright.



10. Home again

A bit tired, I return homewards. At my door there is a bear stretching and turning slowly. I know it is only projected, but still I can feel its heartbeat.

„Hi Marijke!“, I shout when I enter my house. She is the bear's master. A spikey rubber ball is thrown at me. I catch it and throw it back at her. Throwing the ball back and forth, we approach the sofas opposing each other, sit down and go on. No one wants to lose the ball.

„C C C C C“ - that comes from the library. Oh, he is also here again. But my plants will never learn the alphabet, and he knows it.

„D d d d d d d“. I nod towards Marijke, she understands and keeps the ball in her hand.

„John?“, I walk towards the library. „Nice to see you again. Do you want a coffee?“

„Yes please!“, he replies, his eyes twinkling.

„And a tea for you?“, I ask Marijke.

„Yes please. And rosemary honey for my bear if you happen to have that.“ You are asking the right one. Of course I have.

There is a knock at the door. The bear does not mind and keeps on moving.

When I open the door, they are all there.

„We heard there is a party today at your place!“, Franz says while the others are cheering. „Or shall I say a Salon?“

I see flowers, more onions, sausages, guirlandes. Ernesto asks if Francis can join, he's got ice for the drinks. Hans even brought more friends along from the clouds, I recognize Walter, Louise and Roland amongst them.

I am not prepared but that is even better. Come in, I reply invitingly. They do so, form a small parade and pat our daughter and our cat who are standing curiously in the corridor on their heads. Words of all languages fly hence and forth, and then we turn on the music and dance.



Part 2

Why walking

Prologue – About beginnings as slippery fishes

This thesis has been a long run. First I thought I could write something theoretical about the relation of tactility and sculpture and research about the nimbus/aura of artworks which often inhibit touching them.

I have watched „Conspirators of pleasure“ by Jan Svankmajer and have read about his tactile experiments in the 1980ies in Czechoslovakia. I have trawled through texts about erotic attraction and seduction and have tried to apply those principles to the making and viewing of artworks.

I thought about making a sculpture as thesis. Take all my words and bend them into something threedimensional which would not fit in the library closet where all those theses lie around, waiting to be read and touched again. But somehow I did not start writing.

The second thought was to create a compendium of creatures, to basically make a catalogue of my work. After writing two pages I understood that it limited my art and bored me and that it probably would evoke the same feelings in the potential reader.

Around that time I started to take my sculptures for a walk, because I was wondering why I ended up walking around with sculptures or parts of it in public space quite often.

Partly because they were light enough to be carried by one or two persons, but too big to fit in a car – I don't own one anyway – but probably also because I just like to be outside with them.

I documented the walks and that was that. I found out that I preferred the natural way, that I have to have a proper reason to walk with them and, maybe more important, a destination. It must happen „en passant“, then it feels legitimate.

Slightly worried about not advancing with the thesis, I extracted all the words out of my sketchbooks from the last years, to get a hint from the past. The result was around 50 pages full of fragments and raw material like this one:

In mijn mond lopen rivieren

–

hervat

grijp

vang

–

nieuwe vormen

vallen op de grond

nooit eerder gedacht

–

pioggia

lluvia

I remembered that a crucial part of the thesis was to have fun. Obviously, writing fragmentary texts is natural for me and gives me the flow. So why not turning my sketchbooks into a thesis? As a mash-up of diary, archive and slip boxes (Zettelkaesten)? But I still had to figure out how to do that.

One of those days, someone asked me if I would combine my walking experiments with my thesis. I did not see a connection at first. But I started noticing some nodes in the sketchbook extracts; places like the sea or the bridge which kept returning and were sources of inspiration. I arranged the words corresponding to those places.

Subsequently, images started to pop up. My words wanted to meet people. Members of my artistic family fell into place. It was not a fixed order, and artists came in and dropped out again. Some of them really belonged to specific places from the beginning.

The strongest image which kept living in my mind for months was that of my words wanting to build a nest in Franz West's moustache. I would meet him at the playground.

And so I got going.

1. Walking

Träume vom Nichtschwimmen - keine Gelegenheit dazu, reisen, vom immer irgendwo anders sein, unterwegs, in Transit oder in Häusern die so tun, als ob sie uns gehörten. (sketchbook note, The Hague, 2016)

1.1 The distant eye

So first I walked my sculptures, and now I walked my words. Why walking in the first place? That was the next question.

First I searched for companionship. Numerous artists incorporated walking into their oeuvre. I watched the documentation of Bruce Nauman walking around in his studio. I read interviews with Michelangelo Pistoletto about walking his sculptures since the 1960ies and looked at Richard Long's art made by walking in landscapes.

I sympathized with the psychogeography movement which stresses the importance of getting lost. The surrealist practice of deambulation interested me. After all, André Breton thought he met a huge white cockroach during one of those 'automatic' walks. (Coverley 186)

I admired Francis Alÿs for his consequent way of walking through Mexico city in many variations and becoming an urban legend.

Although his work is much more performative, his perception of walking comes in parts close to mine: *„It's a state where you can be both alert to all that happens in your peripheral vision and hearing, and yet totally lost in your own thought process. (...) Walking happens to be a very immediate method for unfolding stories. (...) The walk is simultaneously the material out of which to produce art and the modus operandi of the artistic transaction. And the city always offers the perfect setting for accidents to happen.“* (Ferguson, Fisher and Medina 32)

Yet I did not find the complete answer, so I still had to look somewhere else.

1.2 The inner eye

Let's go for a walk! Whereas my mother has become physically more static with the years – and with her it always have been conversations and discussions at the kitchentable anyway - my father still suggests a „Spaziergang“ every now and then when I am visiting them. Like in former times, it is a way (!) for us to talk about serious issues, about the future, family, sorrows and joys. We reach a similar intimacy, a private bubble, going by car. Being elsewhere, on the road and on the move, is an important requirement for those talks.

„Wer geht, ist mit einem Bein bereits woanders, er ist aufgebrochen, unterwegs, in Bewegung und solange er geht, ist er nirgends angekommen, wandelt er im unbestimmten Zwischen.“ (Fischer 39)

So when I first heard of the Peripatetics in Ancient Greece, I was not astonished at all and immediately understood the legend that Aristotle lectured his students while walking with them. Many philosophers after Aristotle – amongst them Heidegger, Hegel and Derrida - saw thinking as movement. *„To think is to be caught up in a dynamic flow; thinking is, by its very nature, kinetic.“*, writes the anthropologist Tim Ingold. (Ingold 98)

The natural connection of walking and thinking is still present in my life; although slightly speeded up and without communication with someone else. I notice it mainly when I am on the bike, on my way to the academy, to my daughter's school or on the way back home. Those routes and moments of being in-between places, where my body acts as the connecting factor, can be of use as thought accelerator and catalyst.

I know exactly how long it takes from A to B and while cycling, I try to figure out how to structure the rest of the day. At times I experience an Eureka!-moment and see the next step of a problem to solve or a work of art to be done before my inner eye. Being on my way can be part of the preparation or wrap-up of an artistic project, e.g. part of the artistic process.

1.3 Eyes wide open

Every now and then, I notice an unusual situation on the street or see a strange object lying around. Recent examples are a group of men sitting in a miniature steam train, singing and playing the guitar, or a huge stuffed panda bear lying next to a waste container in the rain. Sometimes I stop. And often I collect these images, making them mine by making an inner note, taking a photo or video or dragging an abandoned object or interesting material to my studio.

That is the other side of being on the way – by foot or, in more hectic times, when the clock is ticking faster, by bike: The world of the flâneur. I loved flâneurs from the moment on I learned about their existence. And I have been one myself for many years; strolling around in my cities and taking notes on park benches, in cafés or at home.

Ich gehe mit meinen Augen durch die Stadt und möchte sie manches Mal für eine Weile tauschen gegen die eines anderen. (personal notebook, Berlin, 2000)

The observing and writing go hand in hand with this 'outside' aspect of walking. In my case, it has always stayed fragmentary.

2. Writing

„On est venus ici pour pleurer“, sagte sie und sah mich an, eben, als ich mich neben sie auf die Bank setzte, um auf die Tram 91 zu warten. Sie war eine Erscheinung: Sie trug einen voluminösen weißen Fellmantel und einen dazu passenden weißen Schoßhund, den sie vorsichtig einhüllte. Ihr Gesicht ließ erkennen, dass sie eine sehr schöne Frau gewesen war; eine fein gebogene Nase und geschwungene, grüne Augen. Nun mochte sie Mitte 70 sein und wahrscheinlich nicht arm. Ihre Kleidung und ihre sorgsam gepflegte Frisur verrieten es. Und doch war sie eine verlorene Seele. Sie redete auch, wenn niemand neben ihr saß, und sah anklagend mit ihren traurigen Augen in die Welt. Sie erinnerte mich sehr an meine Großmutter mütterlicherseits, bis hin zum schweren Parfüm einer vergangenen Epoche. „Je ne veux pas être ici!“ fuhr sie fort. „Ca ne me plaît pas du tout. » Wo sie denn dann sein wolle, fragte ich. « Los Angeles ». (personal notebook, Brussels, 2005)

When I look back at fragments like the one above, I see that I stayed true to myself. I rediscovered this report of a short encounter after finishing my walk with the words.

I turned from hidden poet to fragmentary writer to street photographer to artist, and still similar observations, events and images trigger me to incorporate them in my pool of inspirations and to process them into my works.

This digging into the archives of note(book)s and finding new connections and old friends makes me believe in the concept of fragments as hyper-dimensional texture, as a complex labyrinth. It enables serendipity and the creation of various combinations.

In his book „I swear I saw this“, the anthropologist Michael Taussig writes about (field)notebooks being magic encyclopediae. They guard experiences and their continuous revision as well. Through reviewing and rethinking, notes are taken from one context to another and form something new. (Taussig 47-53)

For me my note- and sketchbooks have been important helpers to develop my imaginary walk. As already mentioned, they presented me the places.

3. Mapping

„It is not down in any map; true places never are.“ (Melville 150)

How literally should my walk be? Should it be designed as a map? I sifted through books like *'Mapping it out'*, an alternative atlas of contemporary cartographies edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist. The art works I found reproduced there for sure were interesting, yet being a map to me seemed to be their most important feature.

My wish to draw a map instead came out of giving my thoughts and the walk a structure and to connect them. From Susan Sontag's introduction to Walter Benjamin's *„One way street – and other writings“*, a collection of townscapes, reminiscences of childhood and reflections, I learnt that also for Benjamin, mapping was a way of thinking and ordering.

He seemingly even had played for years with the idea of mapping his life, where he would have colourful signs for marking *„the hotel and brothel rooms that I knew for one night, the decisive benches in the Tiergarten, the ways to different schools and the graves that I saw filled, the sites of prestigious cafés whose long-forgotten names daily crossed our lips.“ (Benjamin 10)*

As a reader I don't need the map to start imagining. The story becomes another space in which to stroll. As the anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it, stories lay down an itinerary. (Ingold 110)

4. Making

„Making is a journey; the maker a journeyman. And the essential characteristic of his activity is (...) that it flows.“ (Ingold 45)

Writing the walk was connected to my artistic practice. While I was for instance working on a human-sized tongue which should turn into a performative sculpture, I was thinking about meeting Marvin Gaye Chetwynd. She is a British artist who builds weird costumes which are worn in community-based performances. At the end we did not match enough in my mind to let her enter my imaginary route.

The places I chose are charged with a web of inspirational memories and constructed out of existing places – well, apart from the clouds. The encounters stand for recurrent values and themes in my work, amongst others sensuality (Neto) or humour (Fischli & Weiss). Real life, writerly imagination and artistic experience intertwine.

Ingold writes about making as a form-generating process, *„a confluence of forces and materials.“* He characterizes making as *„a carrying on – a passage along a path in which every step grows from the one before and into the one following.“* In his view, form arises through movement. And if organisms grow, so do artefacts. (Ingold 22, 45)

Walking through the city, through my studio, through books and the internet and through my head and typing down the words led to my imaginary walk which I see as intrinsically tied to my artistic practice. When I look at my body of work, it is moving.

Epilogue – About humming inventories

„Stories walk, like animals and men. And their steps are not only between narrated events but between each sentence, sometimes each word. Every step is a stride over something not said.“ (Berger 284)

The imaginary walk to a certain extent transcends space and time and is in this regard related to films and dreams.

According to R.E. Jones, quoted by the philosopher Susanne K. Langer, *“motion pictures (...) flow in a swift succession of images, precisely as our thoughts do, and their speed, with their flashbacks—like sudden uprushes of memory—and their abrupt transition from one subject to another, approximates very closely the speed of our thinking. They have the rhythm of the thought-stream and the same uncanny ability to move forward or backward in space or time.“*

The „dreamed reality“ on the screen, writes Langer, is really an eternal virtual present, an endless Now. (Langer 433) As such it is in turn related to lyrical poetry, because *„the lyric poet creates a sense of concrete reality from which the time element has been canceled out, leaving a Platonic sense of 'eternity.'“* (Langer 286)

In the 1950ies, Louise Bourgeois talked about her work in a way which expressed a similar freedom from the ties of time and space, paradoxically not without keeping a sharp eye on them: *„Gradually the relations between the figures I made became freer and more subtle, and now I see my works as groups of objects relating to each other.“*

Although ultimately each can and does stand alone, the figures can be grouped in various ways and fashions, and each time the tension of their relations makes for a different formal arrangement. For this reason the figures are placed in the ground the way people would place themselves in the street to talk to each other.” (Landau 180)

In order to produce my work, I am walking, writing, mapping and making. Doing so, I am thinking, moving forwards and backwards, collecting, connecting and giving serendipity a chance. Ideally, I am in a flow.
I am alive and you, dear reader, are as well.

The role of the artist is, in Ingold's opinion, to follow the forces and flows of material that bring the work into being. And *„to view the work is to join the artist as a fellow traveller, to look with it as it unfolds in the world.“ (Ingold 96)*

The park is the playground, the sea is the studio, the bridge is the sky at night I am the clouds. I am the source and I am giving my words and my world to you.

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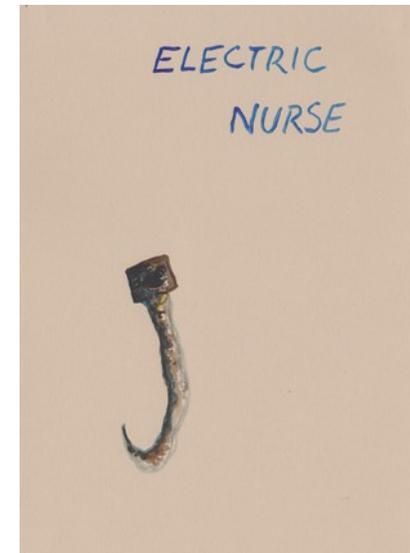
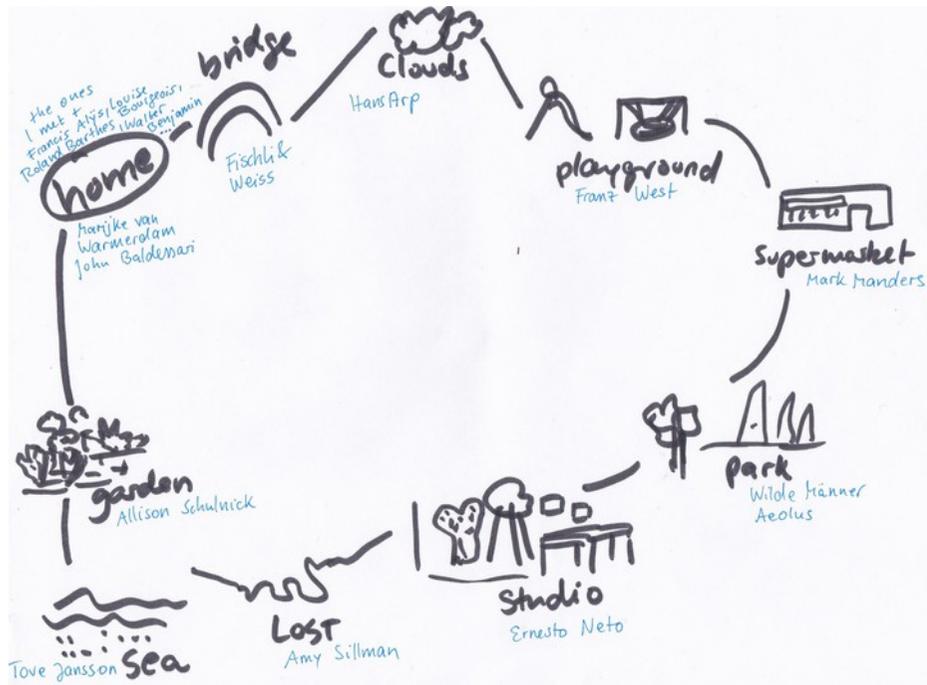
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Auf noch sehr viel mehr
Safarinachmittage, Cappy!
=^_^=