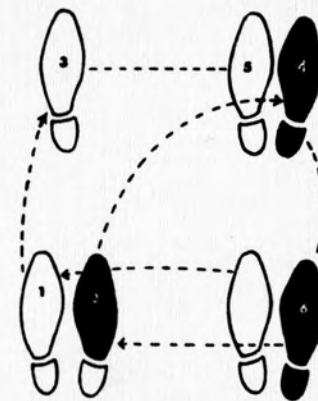


Walk



Cole Swensen

**Walk**  
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leave books  
buffalo, new york

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I

Suppose one day the walking wouldn't stop,  
became compulsive, step beyond step  
and hours later it would no longer  
be safe to be out. Streets are sound.  
One rehearses what to say, what  
to do when they tell you  
you're going blind.

## II

I kept dreaming  
of living alone in the world, in a world full  
of bodies, lovely bodies, no one  
of them in the second person.  
I kept returning to blindness.

And when they were all just bodies  
there were no faces and they stood,  
no, they walked—you could see them walking  
all lined up along and the delicate curve of their spines  
became the horizon and folded  
into themselves. I am  
uncomfortable with faces, they  
make me cry. There are iridescent animals  
too small to be seen with the naked eye  
that live in the lungs and read all night long.  
Around you leaves fall as if something moved.

## III

The blind are the only ones walking. Its accuracy is almost  
frightening but not quite and the portion  
that is sleeping is counting. Bridges crossing rhythmically  
the river divided by footsteps and the remainder  
recurring.

Reflected as in the water bodies  
bright and in their brightness distinct.  
Constellations with pages of  
open light just where the faces should be.  
This can only be seen in the dark.

From a great distance the world  
looks like a face. It hurts. And suddenly I was walking some-  
where  
and I woke up and I was walking somewhere.

## IV

The bridges are suspended as if a person walking  
 has no anchor in any world  
 and the foot lands after the foot  
 like a victim of amnesia in his brand new life.  
 The sound belongs to no one; there  
 are no mouths here, just round Os that mutter  
 zero, zero, zero.

And reading the river from deep  
 within a circle something I follow  
 follows me, the entire body  
 is braille and there  
 is nothing inside.

It seems that often when people  
 are told they are going blind  
 they begin to cry. Replace the eye  
 with an eye. And in the shape of  
 the world. There's a reason that  
 space is dark but I forget it  
 repeatedly.

## V

All those backs are the third person  
 and there's a magic to threes but I  
 can't remember what it is, only  
 endlessly begins. One leans down  
 to pick up something from the ground that I can't see.  
 A perfect reflection  
 of the tall, narrow houses along the quai  
 lined up like so much that comes in lines  
 is unaffected by inversion. The little lights  
 in the windows underwater  
 rooted in constellations moving farther away.  
 A hand goes to the lamp and hesitates.

A single sentence in which  
 no one order above all others.  
 The water in the river always  
 looks the same but they say it is not  
 the river anyway. Your silence  
 is all that doesn't scare  
 me, all that makes of breath a sphere,  
 a pierce in arching space, a chime.

Hands seen in the dark  
 intricately awake. When we  
 read late at night, it's the  
 world, the white page  
 protected from light.

The spine of an iridescent animal  
 is always a circle. So like me it has no face  
 and the moving parts take part in some  
 movement, traceless, that the body  
 replaces with words.

## VI

When you went blind I could no longer  
see you. The curvature  
of the earth will make  
these lines run together,  
ships sailing parallel disappear in a single point

so you could walk with me always  
one has, they say, something white  
that hovers just behind the left shoulder  
and that the blind can move in silence  
far beyond their bodies, there  
you were.

There's a river to my left without number.

The zero can see with the blindness of a lover.  
Turn around when you hear.  
What folds and finds some dearer measure  
that the foot can't bare. And it hesitates.

## VII

Now the streets are silent  
and the silence runs forward in streets.  
Sheets of paper folded in a pocket,  
blank. It is in the nature of bodies  
that one day one will turn around and say  
simply what time is it or  
excuse me but your constant walking  
or were you reading and what happened  
to the trees that once lined this river  
disrupting its line by shooting  
upward, then outward in  
a geometric progression  
of both sound and light  
whereas the blind read by touch  
in which the constellations and the rhythmic footsteps  
obey the same laws of nature  
and no river enters to lift layer from layer  
from sight.

VIII

One fears the walking will never stop.  
One unbroken line to the sea.  
Ships without faces, just eyes  
to stand for the curvature of the earth,  
to hold its place, like a zero  
waits and so develops its own life.  
I walked around the island  
several times but never turned around.

When we read, it's in a straight line  
and what walks behind is bodied in sound  
and on and on. We see  
the backs of words in single file  
while their eyes press beyond.  
You count. And the counting is  
a choosing, sense by sense  
the shape of a world that can't  
be seen from the distance. The darkness  
of deep space rivered with hands.

IX

*whose eyes turn to bone*

The sheet  
has turned white and lodged.  
I feel a face alight and we'll  
both be blind and sound  
will multiply on its axis,  
gain momentum and cry.

*whose bones turn to sky*

The walking can be argued  
as pure action. That which  
sets the cell walls trembling  
and dissolves. Numbers  
never did anyone any good  
without uncountable zeros.  
The eyes of another that you would  
caress, lids closed and thus  
slow by touch alone.

X

The problem with us is we  
live alone in the world.  
Faces are beautiful objects  
that shine behind windows  
and that it's a beautiful world  
and its objects are perfect  
and perfectly sealed.

Leaned down and picked up  
something small from the ground.

When I was alone in the world  
everything breathed.