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Cell-Out: A Long-Distance Mobile Performance of Scores, Reflections, Confessions

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# Cell-Out: A Long-Distance Mobile Performance of Scores, Reflections, Confessions

**Claudia Brazzale and Leslie Satin**

## **Abstract**

“Cell-Out” is a performance, a collaborative investigative enactment of physical, spatial, and communicative mobility in urban areas, and an exploration of walking in the digital city through shifts of space, attention, and time. Claudia Brazzale and Leslie Satin approach walking as dancers whose embodied practices are based largely in Western contemporary dance techniques and somatic / contemplative forms, including early post-modern dance's cultivation of pedestrian movement; their scholarly work is grounded in autobiography and auto-ethnography. The piece centers on a series of compositional scores in which each writer directs the other toward specific actions, places, and areas of focus. Other parts of the piece contextualize and arise from these scores, weaving through the authors' scholarship on dance and space and flowing into their art lives and personal experience. Brazzale's and Satin's explorations of walking and writing as experiential, affective, digressive, phenomenological, anatomical, performative, mnemonic, and analytical emerge from and create a kind of double memoir, enacting their long-term, long-distance relationship and acknowledging the digital tools that support and (re)produce their intimacy--even as the Coronavirus pandemic, which erupted as they were completing their piece, dismantled intimacy worldwide.

## Prelude

This collaborative piece explores walking in the digital city through multiple routes, bypasses, and shifts of space, attention, and time. As the title indicates, it diverges from traditional academic writing, focused on exposition and analysis; instead, it is situated within contemporary interdisciplinary scholarly experimentation, joining practice-as-research to creative non-fiction, particularly performative writing. We approach walking as dancers whose embodied practices are based largely in Western modern and post-modern techniques and somatic / contemplative forms, rather than as “Walking Artists.”<sup>1</sup> Our scholarship, as well as our dance practices, are grounded in the 1960s and 1970s history of post-modern dance and its cultivation of the pedestrian; these perspectives underlie our approach to and interpretation of walking. Moreover, our scholarly work is grounded in autobiography and auto-ethnography, genres in which the writing and the writer are integral to the events and experiences of the text.

“Cell-Out” is a *performance*, an investigative *enactment* of physical, spatial, and communicative mobility in urban areas. It centers on exchanging, carrying out, and responding to a series of compositional scores in which each writer directs the other toward specific actions, places, and areas of focus. Other parts of the piece contextualize and arise from these scores, based on our perspectives on walking, dancing, writing, and urban life as they weave through our scholarly work on dance and space and flow into our art lives and personal experience. Our individual and joint explorations of walking and writing as *experiential*, *affective*, *digressive*, *phenomenological*, *anatomical*, *performative*, *mnemonic*, and *analytical* emerge from and create a kind of double memoir, which both enacts and reflects on our long-time relationship, framed by our actual distance (we live on either side of the Atlantic Ocean) and the digital tools we have used to continually (re)produce intimacy over the years. This last element is especially significant given

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<sup>1</sup> The Walking Artists Network, an organization focused on walking practice as art, “seeks to connect those who define themselves as walking artists—or who are interested in walking as a mode of art practice” (<https://www.walkingartistsnetwork.org/>). These artists often follow a lineage of socially engaged practice drawn from the Situationists and Dadaists, among others (see Morris, 2020). Though numerous American artists have created walking-based work, the phenomenon of the walking artist is considerably more developed in Europe than in the US.

that the Coronavirus pandemic, which erupted as we were completing our piece, dismantled physical and spatial intimacy on a worldwide level.<sup>2</sup>

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**Claudia Brazzale (CB):** Before venturing on this project, I came across a walking meditation website that described the practice of walking as a way to “de-fragment our minds, recollect segmented parts and integrate them into a whole” (Bodhipaksa 2000). I have always been concerned with this recollection of segmented parts, or what I refer to as “finding threads.” The need to thread through stories and experiences across generational, cultural, and geographical distances came from the fragmentation I first experienced at home and later abroad. At home the generational gap, not just between my parents and me—which was a real socio-cultural chasm—but also between my much older sisters and me, often needed bridging and translations. Later on, I moved abroad to pursue a dance career, which added a further worldview and geographical distancing that required a more conscious labor of weaving through spatial and temporal gaps.<sup>3</sup>

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**Leslie Satin (LS):** I live in New York City, on the street designating the southern end of a very large apartment complex. Across the street is the northern edge of the East Village/Alphabet City—really two neighborhoods mashed together. I see these as my neighborhood. This is a more literal act of *seeing* than might be apparent: When I look out my southern-facing windows toward the neighborhood beginning across the street, I gaze only at the avenue, skipping the tacky commercial street itself, now topped by large ugly residential buildings and a subway re-

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<sup>2</sup> This piece was largely composed in the weeks before the public health crisis that would occupy most of the earth’s population. We were attuned to our health in the terms of first-world everyday body maintenance, especially the requirements and vulnerabilities of women, of dancers; we could eat thoughtfully and well, and we had access to traditional and alternative medical care. That comfort level, especially as manifested in our participation in public space, in the everyday life of our cities—in walking and public transportation, above all—imploded with the worldwide arrival of the Coronavirus, which has dramatically disrupted the rules and conventions of our behavior, especially regarding the vexed borders of intimacy and “social distance.” In NYC and London, where almost everyone rides the generally jammed trains and buses, people still riding them early in the crisis averted their faces from each other; awkwardly anchored themselves with hips, feet, elbows; bent their heads over cell phone screens. Fewer and fewer people rode as the weeks went by.

<sup>3</sup> This is something I explored further in my essay, “(Un)Covering Ground: Dance, Space and Mobility” (2014).

construction project that has interfered with underground, overground, and pedestrian traffic and blocked street-level views for nearly three years.

The East Village was carved out of the larger area known as the Lower East Side, distancing it from that neighbourhood's history, poverty, and vivid but not always peaceful mix of ethnic/racial/religious/cultural immigrant life. The name linked it, instead, to the more upscale West Village (the term, along with "the Village," that many New Yorkers use to designate Greenwich Village), long known for its art, artists, and beautiful streetscapes and architecture--and whose artist residents migrated east in the early 1960s, "fleeing [its] rising rents" (McKinley 1995: 2).<sup>4</sup> The East Village is variously hip, culturally rich, demographically and economically mixed by decades of gentrification and real estate machinations; Alphabet City's cultural and commercial offerings have also been continuously altered by gentrification's geographical re-drawing, but, as evidenced by Spanish-language shop names and offerings and street signs and, significantly, by the east-side border of public housing, has maintained its long-term demographics: more people of color, more economically fragile residents. These neighborhoods and the people who live in them are in constant flux, their social choreography animating and embodying the jagged maps of their changes.

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**CB:** My scholarly journey was an attempt to weave through what seemed like disconnected episodes of my life, which had been separated by geographical and emotional distance. Before the internet and mobile communication revolution, living abroad often felt like a life of intervals, with distance putting on pause episodes of life tied to specific places. A few years into my dance and waitressing life in New York, I returned to school to earn a degree that could get me a job. That's when I met Leslie, and my path was re-routed. She was my professor at SUNY Empire State College, and one of my first essay assignments with her was to write on the learning I had accumulated during my dance training through the years. This auto-biographical/ethnographic exercise was a first attempt to link movement and geographically fragmented experiences through writing. It was also the beginning of new pathways and migratory

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<sup>4</sup> See also Ada Calhoun's *St. Marks is Dead: The Many Lives of America's Hippest Street*, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015 and Heather Mulliner's "The East Village: Birth of a Neighborhood," *Researching Greenwich Village History: Companion Site to Creating Digital History (NYU GA HIST.2033)*  
<https://greenwichvillagehistory.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/the-east-village-birth-of-a-neighborhood/>

journeys toward my first exploration of dance anthropology. Eventually I left New York. Years later, through shared scholarly and dance pursuits, Leslie and I crossed paths again. As I moved in and out of New York and the US, digital communication allowed our relationship to survive the geographical distance that separated us. Our discussions and readings of each other's work—which had almost always occurred in motion, as we walked together to or from a dance studio or university building in downtown Manhattan—transitioned to emails, Skype, and finally WhatsApp messaging and calls interspersed with occasional visits across the Atlantic. While traces of our in-motion dialogues were captured in different segments of our writing and choreographic work, we wanted also to document our pedestrian thought-filled actions and exchanges.<sup>5</sup> "Cell-Out" was a way for Leslie and me to formalize the traces of this Thinking-Through-Walking. This assemblage of scores and reflections, and the multi-sited *weaving through* that we have been practicing throughout our long-term and long-distance friendship and professional relationship, brought new insight to our movement together through time and space.

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**LS:** For years, my husband, D.—like me, a conscientious research-walker—has made and maintained a map of several of Alphabet City's avenues and side streets. Its design is similar, though not identical, to that of London's Tube map, which indicates how to get anywhere from anywhere else, providing spatial instructions but no actual distances (or, by extension, durations) or images of spatial complexities. *This* map clearly names and situates those shops and cafes which have closed and been replaced, sometimes more than once; it is a testament to the area's ongoing changes, the multiple and perpetually in-progress "scapes" (street-, sound-) and systems (e.g., transportation, housing options) embodied by its inhabitants.

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**CB:** I have lived in New York, Los Angeles, Florence, Trento, Liverpool, and now London. Walking and observing the city is something I have done in all of them. Although New York and London are the cities I have walked in most often, it was in Los Angeles—the automotive city—that I unexpectedly became attentive to the practice of urban walking. In LA I discovered my propensity for drifting and constantly sabotaging the logic

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow here from Susan Leigh Foster's understanding of bodily motion as a "thought-filled form or action and articulation/speech act" in its own right (2002:131).

of the urban grid and mind. LA's urban sprawl, with its gated communities and its interstate highways designed to avoid pedestrian movement and encounters in public space sparked my interest in *Space and Place; The Production of Space; The Fate of Space; and Space, Place, and Gender*.<sup>6</sup>

In New York and London, walking—in its principal role of moving me from one place to another—never took the form of a drift or a pleasurable stroll. Walking in those cities was a frenzied motion in always too-cold, too-wet, or too-hot weather. Walking in London in response to Leslie's scores forced me to slow down and tap back into the appreciation for urban drifting that I paradoxically developed in a city of cars. I also experienced a sort of Walking-Writing process during which the thinking done through the walking was similar to the process of de-fragmenting and re-ordering of ideas and stories that characterizes my writing process.

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LS: We live in a vast middle-class housing complex built after the end of World War II. It is part of NYC's huge Cold War urban renewal movement, whose lofty foundational ideals clashed from the start with anxieties of activists, architects, lawyers, and other "doubters," who argued that urban renewal "uprooted stable neighborhoods, fed the creation of new slums, perpetuated deindustrialization, and redoubled racial segregation" (Zipp 10). Like other such complexes, it disrupted the spatial and demographic map of the area, dropped into Manhattan's basic grid with its spacious double square, internal curvilinear streetscape, playgrounds, benches, grass and other plants. Some find it attractive, others see it as an enormous (albeit unusually green) prison, like a military base. Either way, its construction dislodged longtime residents and effectively put new borders, if not barriers, between Alphabet City and its now-whiter neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This list actually reproduces the titles of several prominent scholars who have explored space and place. These include Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977), Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991), Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place* (1997), and Doreen Massey's *Space, Place and Gender* (1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Samuel Zipp's *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (2010) for its discussion and analysis of the controversial phenomenon of post-War urban renewal. Interestingly, given the focus of this article about walking and cell phones, Zipp acknowledges a commonly attributed division between the "planners" and the "walkers"—that is to say, the "view from the tower" and the "view from the ground" (11)—but complicates these categories, their stability, and their participation in the changing "cityscape" (12). Zipp's chapter on Stuyvesant Town addresses the origins of the complex referred to in this article: a "suburb in the city," a "modernist-inspired, whites-only housing reserve at [one] end of the Lower East Side" (19).

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**CB:** Leslie and I initially discussed ways in which we could interact digitally during our walks and intervene in each other's scores in real time. Choreographing digital possibilities or remotely exploring interactive pedestrian choreographies was not part of our habitual practice, however; nor did it reflect the thought-filled motion we did back in New York (not even in its long-distance, remote digital reconfiguration). Accordingly, we decided to approach this project in the way we would have gone about a choreographic collaboration. With our shared aesthetics and philosophy—grounded in the pedestrian, everyday movements of post-modern dance and contact improvisation and their focus on process over end-product—we set scores for each other and maintained our own individual approach in our responses (Fig.1).

We did this our own way. Leslie, with her focus on the problem-solving labor of choreography, attends minutely to the scores. I, caught between a post-modern suspension of expectations and a modernist need for significance, resist my way through the directives.

We gave each other scores for asynchronous walks in which the digital connection could come in and out the same way it does in our everyday walking: with simultaneous reluctance and acceptance. We did not insist on the augmented experience of digital technologies and the network. Susan Foster's eloquent writing on contact improvisation is instructive here because it sheds light on a certain kind of sensibility that was significant in our walks (which were not, of course, *contact* improvisation): "minutes of tedium as dancers remain true to the instant are suddenly eclipsed by an astonishing connection between two bodies" (2002:136). We performed our set scores, focusing on the physicality of our tasks while listening, observing, gazing, sensing, passing by, and attending to our internal sensations and thoughts, to what was happening outside. We let things happen in the manner of what contact improviser Cynthia Novack called "letting the dance happen" (Novack in Foster 2002: 123). We treated all unplanned unexpected sights as potential new directions to follow or not. As we approached the digital page to write this article, this improvisational sensibility and democratic approach to motion and things-in-motion continued to guide us. We stayed close to what we encountered during the scores without providing any translations or specific meanings. This was an effort to account for what Kathleen Stewart calls "ordinary affects," or, as she succinctly puts it, the "things that happen" (2007:2). As Stewart explains, "ordinary



affects work not through ‘meanings’ per se, but rather in the way they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds” (2007: 3). We invite the reader to experience our scored performances and reflections in a similar vein.

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Score 1 by Leslie for Claudia:  
Pay Attention to the Pedestrian and Car Traffic

Begin at your front door.  
Turn right and walk to corner.  
Turn right and walk to the next corner.  
Stand still for 30 seconds. (If there is a stoplight, the 30 seconds will be in addition to the time of the stoplight and may thus bring in the additional time of a second stoplight.)  
Turn left and walk to the next corner.  
Stand still for 30 seconds. (If there is a stoplight, the 30 seconds will be in addition to the time of the stoplight and may thus bring in the additional time of a second stoplight.)  
Walk back home in the most direct way possible.  
If you like, repeat the entire score up to here.  
Write.



**CB:** As I exit the house and close the door behind me, I take a moment to look at what is right in front of me; it’s another solid gray day, the grayness blanketing the sky and the city. It is not raining, but the pavements and the walls of buildings are soaking wet from continuous rain in the past few days. I start walking along Merton Road, where I have recently moved. It is my second move in the seven years I have lived in London. Given the average number of moves I have made during my adult life, I consider two moves in seven years an achievement.

I momentarily switch from my physical walk and, in an attempt to remember the streets I have lived on, I Google-map Liverpool and zoom in to search for Sefton Park. As I switch to Street View, the image of the house I lived in for two years pops open. It is so vivid that I feel the urge to turn to Chobin to show her. She is sleeping on her office chair next to mine. Her feline eyes ignore the image on the screen showing where she used to venture out chasing magpies and squirrels. Before Liverpool she had spent years of witnessing New York City life from a window (Figures1-2).



Figures 1-2. Photo credit: C. Brazzale

I write a list of the major places in which I have lived:

- *East 6<sup>th</sup>, West 13<sup>th</sup>, West 16<sup>th</sup>, West 17<sup>th</sup>, and Houston Streets (New York)*
- *via dei Renai and Via Paisiello (Florence)*
- *Kensington Road (Los Angeles)*
- *via Trento (Trento)*
- *Sefton Park Road (Liverpool)*
- *Kenton Road, Ritson Road and Merton Road (London)*

I cannot remember a few places and I am tempted to log into my Amazon profile to retrieve the addresses that might be stored in my delivery list. I decide to come back to the present instead and resume my walk down Merton Road.

The gray light blankets the blackened red brick buildings, the traffic, the rubbish on the pavement, and the few shops across the street (Figure. 3):

- *A kebab take-out*
- *A funeral home*
- *Franklands Family Butchers tucked in between Sharif's Halal Meat and Groceries and a Londis*
- *Two barber shops—Mr. Boy and SketchCut*
- *La Grande Pizza*
- *A "Solicitor"*
- *A dry cleaner*



Figure 3. Images from Merton Road. Photo credit. C. Brazzale.

I default to comparative mode. The colorful stalls of Ridley Road Market, on the route from my old place in East London to Dalston Kingsland's overground station, come to mind. I am once again going back to the past. A pedestrian area from 8 am to 6 pm, Ridley Road was always packed with moving bodies. In the morning, it was mostly women pulling their shopping carts slowly from stall to stall, stocking on cassavas, yams, plantains, Tropiway Fufu packs, and Maggi cubes (Figure 4). In the late afternoon, the middle of the street filled up with vendors disassembling their precarious stalls and carts; fishmongers in high rubber boots emptied buckets of melted ice; plump seagulls walked undisturbed in their search for scraps while hairdressers and tailors in their tiny shops on the side of the street continued their activities through the night. There are hardly any people or animals here on Merton Road today, just cars and trucks speeding by (Figure 3).



Figure 4. Images from Ridley Road Market, Hackney, London. Photo credit. C. Brazzale.

My second right is after the local pub, a recently refurbished old Coaching Inn painted green, with a small beer garden corner whose deserted wood tables and benches face a bus stop. I stand still for thirty seconds between the bus stop and the pub's blackboard announcing the Six Nation rugby game. A woman pushes a pram and a kid in school uniform shows up as the double-decker bus pulls in at the Park Tavern stop. I gladly resume my walk, turning to the quiet street on the right of the pub, lined with fancy houses on one side of the street and a medium-size estate on the other side.

Despite looking at the score on my cell phone several times, I unconsciously mess up the instructions and turn right again into a lane that takes me to a red brick building of ex-council flats (public housing). There are no cars or people going by. The lane naturally bends to the left and I consciously decide to also bend the score and take a pause at the end of the lane. I follow the instruction to stand still for thirty seconds, but I am self-conscious standing immobile on the corner of a residential street. I try to push aside my uneasiness to focus on my body. The shortness of breath from the slight uphill walk triggers what is now becoming a customary stream of thoughts about the progressive decline of my fitness:

- sedentary work
- irregular cardio-physical activity for which my Iyengar yoga practice cannot compensate
- bad weather
- pollution
- aging

I find standing still in the street particularly challenging. After thirty seconds I gladly reach for my cell phone to check on the score one more time and appear as if I have a purpose in this uncomfortable stillness. As I look for my glasses to see the numbers, I am pressing to unlock my phone, and I think of how this gadget has taken up a function that cigarettes used to have. When I was a teenager and non-smoker, I often observed how friends who smoked seemed so comfortable being on their own in public spaces. The cigarette gave them a purpose. For me this was, and, to some extent still is, needed in order to feel comfortable standing still in a public space.

I proceed and stop again for another 30 seconds. I am aware of what passers-by may think. With a sigh of relief, I resume walking



and head straight back home. I don't have any particular feelings about my walk, but my body feels a bit better.

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**LS:** My paternal grandfather grew up on the Lower East Side. When he was a child, he told me, he sometimes wrote on the walls of his family's apartment. When I returned to NYC after college and first lived in apartments on the disputed border of the East Village and the Lower East Side, I looked for traces of his scrawls in every apartment I rented. I never found them. When Grandpa Phillip walked in the neighborhood, he had to pay attention to what was going on around him, to be aware of which people and which streets were potentially dangerous to a young Jewish boy. Of course, he had no cell phone.

Many years later, a friend of mine, not long past his midwestern adolescence, got beaten up several times in these same streets, attacked by newer bullies, this time for being readably gay. He, too, didn't have a cell phone—it was the '70s—which he could have used to call for help, though it could also have been stolen.

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**CB:** Having exhausted several study and research visa options in the US, in 2012 I re-located to what I thought was "Europe." After two years in Liverpool, I returned to London, the city I had first moved to when I was nineteen years old to pursue dance training. Twenty-five years later, despite having lived in a variety of major global cities, I still found navigating London quite challenging. Not only had London radically changed, I had been spoiled by the urban grid of lower Manhattan, which affected not only my sense of direction but also any accurate estimation of travel time. When I returned to London, my new Samsung Galaxy S7 smartphone, equipped with transit and mapping apps, became my chaperone for each of my moves and commutes around the city.

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**LS:** Claudia and I have been friends for many years. We met when she was my student, in New York, and we have been close most of the time since then, despite almost always living miles and oceans away and only sharing the same city for short periods. We talk quite often, though, usually at odd hours for at least one of us, and generally on our mobile phones via FaceTime or WhatsApp video, so it feels more like a "real" visit, with cups

of tea and eyeglasses, and we can see each other's sweaters and families and pets and home renovations.

We decided to collaborate on this project about a single aspect of the digital city: walking and cell phones. We saw it as a duet acknowledging our friendship, our scholarship, and our dance lives, as well as our individual reflections on walking (with and without cell phones) and on the places where we walk, or once did, or wish we could. This duet was conceived as a joint effort of individual writing and improvisational editing, centered on a series of focused activities. To that end, we sent each other three walking scores, all somehow involving cell phones. We decided that we would not speak on the phones, to each other or anyone else, during the performance of these scores. Each of us would carry out the scores in our own city and write, later, about the experiences of doing so; our methods for collecting, documenting, and interacting with our research would be determined by each of us.

Our scores, it turned out, were quite similar, attuned to a range of embodied circumstances, variously specific in terms of instructions, focus on sound as well as sight, recognizing the value of memory in engaging with a place. Both of us made an effort to recognize the attributes of the neighborhoods where these walks would occur—but we made mistakes. For instance, I knew Claudia's previous neighborhood, Hackney, in East London, quite well, but she'd recently moved to Wandsworth, in West London, which I don't know at all. Remembering some lovely bakeries, I sent her to one as part of the instructions, but there weren't any such shops, and she had to adjust the score. Similarly, Claudia hadn't been to my NYC neighborhood in several years; the supermarket she gave as a landmark had just closed, and I replaced it when performing the score with its architectural shell. Claudia's reference to my apartment complex as an "estate" was a British/American terminology mix-up rather than a rebranding of a middle-class housing project. And the walk from the Tisch building, where we went to graduate school (at different times) to my workplace isn't much, only a few steps.

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Score 1 by Claudia for Leslie:  
Listening

Begin just outside your apartment and walk to the elevator  
Take the elevator down  
Exit the building  
Turn right and walk on 14<sup>th</sup> street going West  
Turn right at the first road before the supermarket  
Walk into the loop road of the estate  
Take the second road to the left  
Find a place to sit in the sun—if it's raining, find a dry place to stand  
Listen to the surrounding sound—what is the first sound you observe? What is the sound impressed on your mind?  
Walk back home paying attention to the sequence of sounds you encounter—notice as they fade (or abruptly) come in and out  
Observe the sounds outside in the city when you shut the door behind you  
Take a pen and paper and write a soundscape

LS: Since the score suggests that I sit in the sun, I wait awhile for a sunny day. (I want to perform the scores in order, so I can't jump to another one without first completing this one.) After quite a few cold and gloomy days, I give up and leave the apartment one morning about 9:15, carrying only my cell phone, umbrella, keys, a pen, and a small pad of paper. It is yet another damp gray day with rain not quite falling.

I pause outside my apartment door to begin this variation on walking meditation. I slowly walk to the elevator, which is empty. I enter, and start there to focus on sound, noticing a not-so-quiet buzz, or whirr. (Is that always there? How could I have never heard it?) When the elevator stops at the street-level floor, I exit and stand still for a moment outside the door. Here, I notice another, quieter mechanical rumble, maybe coming from one of the hallway doors, around and to the right. I walk there and put my ear to the wall and the doors but can't tell the point of the sound's origin. I hear the click of the second of two entrance doors opening, followed by a young woman in red plaid pants who enters the little lobby (really a vestibule) and whisks through it; we make no eye contact and do not greet each other. I hear her footsteps rushing up one flight of stairs and the blunt groan of the stairwell door opening. And then I hear another unidentifiable mechanical sound, and numerous untraceable noises coming from the apartments and halls above me.

I leave the building and follow the score. On 14<sup>th</sup> Street, I pass two young women, arm in arm and heads close, giggling and speaking to each other in Spanish. Of course, this being a main urban

thoroughfare, it's noisy, and I hear many sounds, predominantly the din of traffic: cars, trucks, buses, construction vehicles. I note the cacophony, keeping myself open to the sounds that are louder or more piercing or otherwise an auditory surprise. ("Happy New Ears!" wrote John Cage in 1963.) What is especially salient is the repeated thuddy bump of wheels going over metal plates in this giant construction zone.

As I walk, even with all this racket, I hear the soft, irregular pulse of shoes hitting the pavement. It's not as crowded as I was expecting. Shockingly, not a single person I pass is using a cell phone! As I approach the turn-off, I remember the local supermarket, which finally shut its doors last December, a casualty, presumably, of the nearby Amazon/Whole Foods; the new-ish Target (ironically located, given its down-market profile, in terms of urban design aesthetics, on the street-level floor of a large new "luxury" residential building—its exterior wall emblazoned EVGB, for East Village's Greatest Building—aimed at rich young new-to-New-Yorkers who party on the rooftop); digital order-in enterprises like Blue Apron and Seamless; and now, a sprawling, subterranean Trader Joe's.

I turn left into the complex and encounter more walkers, some with dogs. I pass a middle-aged man with a strong Italian/NYC accent complaining about his recalcitrant bulldog, who is spread out on the sidewalk. "Bobby doesn't want to move," he explains to someone I can't see—"I don't know who's walking who."

I'd planned to stop at the concrete flag-stand, a convenient place to sit, but I continue on the curving path toward a blue light on a streetlamp (Figure 5). I hear more car honks, and construction vehicles' back-up beeps. I hear (and see) more walkers. Most wonderfully, and unusually for this spot and this time of year, I hear many bird sounds, an array of songs and cries. Way above my head and spreading into broad horizontals, they trace what I see in my mind's eye as celestial figure-eights.





Figure 5. Photo credit: L. Satin

Moving into lower vertical space, I notice, with pleasure and for the first time, the grid pattern of the low fences edging the grassy areas around the apartment buildings (Figure 6). I see the occasional squirrel scoot by and think of the cat and the mice in Bruce Nauman's studio video. (There is some humor here: I love Nauman's movie, mice and all, of "nothing" happening for many hours; I am terrified of off-screen rodents.) I notice a long narrow puddle, which reminds me, absurdly, of a glorious walk last summer with a friend who lives in the Pennines. We hiked about four miles each way from her cottage near Garrigill to Nenthead and back again on a glorious sunny, breezy day, traversing vast grassy expanses under huge blue skies. Now, I adjust my cell phone camera's focus to make the puddle look like a river . . . but it's no Nent (Figure 7).



Figures 6 and 7. Photo credits: L. Satin.

I retrace my steps and walk back. Now, every single person I pass or see at a distance, all of them walking, is on a cellphone; most of them are talking or listening, and a fair number are looking down at their screens. I linger outside my building, take a few photos of the ugly construction site(s) (Figure 8). It gets only a little quieter when I enter my building, but I feel that quiet in my body. I go upstairs, sit down at my desk, and write these words.



Figure 8. Photo credit: L. Satin.

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Score 2 by Leslie for Claudia:  
Pay Attention to Your Body

Begin at a good bakery; buy a roll or pastry to eat when you arrive at home.

Leave the bakery and walk to the nearest park or playground.

Enter. Standing still near the gate for five to ten minutes, observe both still and moving people. As your time to leave approaches, concentrate on your snack.

Leave the park and slowly walk home by your chosen route.

Enter the house, say hello to J. (if he's there), and go to the kitchen/dining room table.

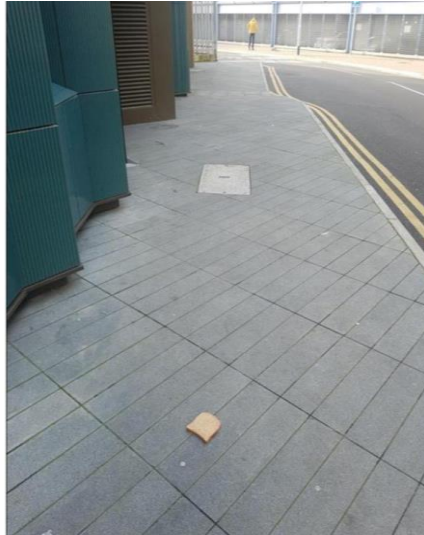
Make a cup of tea; have your tea and snack in silent contemplation for at least ten minutes.

Write.



**CB:** I don't know any bakeries near here. Since moving into this neighborhood, I have been buying bread at the supermarket. I am still struggling with the residue of the migraine I suffered yesterday, and I just crave fresh air and nature. I decide to substitute bread with cut flowers. I start my walk at the exit of the Sainsbury's supermarket, where I buy orange tulips and ibuprofen. I walk to the nearest park and stop at the entrance, as the score instructs. Again, I feel uncomfortable standing still on my own in public space, so I approach the little doggy coming toward me and kneel down. The dog owner, a woman texting while leaning on the handle of the pram she is pushing, soon follows. After a short chat with her about shih tzus, I find it hard to go back to the score, which indicates that I should stand still for 10 minutes. I decide to walk around the park and take deep breaths to help ease the migraine and the nausea. On the way back home, tulips in hand, I have a surprise encounter: the bread of the score appears on my path (Figures 9-10). I take some photos, go home, place the tulips in a vase next to my computer, and start writing.





Figures 9 and 10. Photo credit: C. Brazzale

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LS: I try not to talk on the cell phone when I walk in the city—by which I mean New York City, not *any* city. This is not because I see NYC as distinct from other cities—which, of course, it is (as is any city)—but because it’s so familiar to me that I sometimes travel through rather than in it and ignore its details. This phenomenon—what is ignored, what is ignorable—is central to my variously espoused and enacted practice of paying attention, especially the element of paying attention in public spaces, of noticing what is around me and my experience of this noticing.

“Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps...,” wrote Georges Perec, the experimental 20<sup>th</sup>-century French writer who knew the significance of everyday objects, actions, events. “You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless” (2008: 50).

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Score 2 by Claudia for Leslie:  
Living Others' Memories

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Begin at your front door.  
Turn right and walk to corner.  
Turn right and walk to the next corner.  
Stand still for 30 seconds. (If there is a stoplight, the 30 seconds will be in addition to the time of the stoplight and may thus bring in the additional time of a second stoplight.)  
Turn left and walk to the next corner.  
Stand still for 30 seconds. (If there is a stoplight, the 30 seconds will be in addition to the time of the stoplight and may thus bring in the additional time of a second stoplight.)  
Walk back home in the most direct way possible.  
If you like, repeat the entire score up to here.  
Write.



**LS:** I know that I am slightly cheating when I perform this score, because Claudia has suggested or implied that I would do it on my way to work. But I go on a Sunday, another cold and gray day, after a fairly relaxed morning and early afternoon. This is already a digression from my usual commute in several ways: It's late (2:15 p.m. when I leave my apartment). I'm hauling less than I generally do (no books, papers, dance clothes), but the same two bags, to accommodate what I know I'll be carrying by the time I get home. Extending the score to include the several-blocks-long trip to Union Square, I walk on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which I generally avoid; I walk west on the south side of the street, the opposite of what I do when I *do* walk on that street.

The street is crowded, and most people are either walking alone and carrying shopping bags and cell phones or in pairs and trios, talking to each other. I have to pass through a long construction-detour tunnel, which is jammed; I find myself stuck behind a small halting woman, presumably elderly, struggling with a heavy bag, pretty lavender flowers peeking out. I don't want to zoom around her and seem to deride her slowness. When I finally manage the swerve, I discover that she's neither old nor feeble, just texting. Joke's on me.

I walk south on the west side of Broadway. About halfway down the block I stop and nestle into the metal and glass wall of a bank and close my eyes behind my sunglasses for about a minute. I feel pleasantly removed from the general action, playing a self-directed game of peek-a-boo in which everyone disappears as visual entities and is transformed into pure sound. I hear segments of Spanish, French, and Portuguese conversations sweep by, some bits clearly

starting and ending, others fading in or out, suggesting to me the shapes of the speakers' groups, the pedestrian traffic patterns. I hear almost no English. I hear babies and children squealing. Most of the sound seems to be coming from the north, to my left. I feel very peaceful in my private darkness.

I open my eyes, adjust. It's true that most people are headed south; this continues to be intermittently true until about 10<sup>th</sup> Street, when the mix becomes more robust. As directed, I look up and out and snap a few photos with my phone of the view to the southern horizon; I include Strand Books, where I will stop post-score to pick up a new book about walking (Figure 11).

I keep walking south, on the lookout for something new or recent. Nothing "official" moves me, the commercial replacements for their predecessors making me feel grumpy about capitalism's hold on the streets. I'm cheered, though, inside yet another construction tunnel, to see elegant, stately Grace Church reframed through the tiny squares of the gridded glassless windows. "Fractalized" occurs to me, but that's a stretch (Figure 12).



Figures 11-12. Photo credit: L. Satin

I walk on to the Tisch building, noticing what a mix of people are walking and talking, some of them tucked into niches or corners to make a phone call or text in relative quiet and stillness. Usually, the demographic is skewed toward students, in variously fabulous costumes and hairstyles, chatting and proclaiming and texting and smoking, often quite apart from the cadres of faculty and staff who are just as focused and frenetic, if not generally quite so fabulous. I used

to be one of those students and continue to be just as excited by the buzz of academia, however hyper-aware I am of the toll of keeping body and soul (mine, others') together over the years. I teach a building away from the department where I was a grad student and young mother, juggling Foucault and Barthes and the babysitter and the dance studio. I take a photo of a newish shop across the street, where I once bought four ecologically sound stainless-steel drinking straws (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Photo credit: L. Satin

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### Score 2 by Leslie for Claudia (Repeat)

**CB:** I decide to reinterpret score 2 today. My partner, J., who grew up in this area, reminds me of a French bakery a twenty-minute walk away from us. I decide to repeat the score using this bakery as the starting point. The bakery is in a small, narrow shop with tarts and croissants displayed in the front window and bread closer to the cashier at the back. I buy one *pain au chocolat*, one almond *croissant*, one raspberry tart, and a *baguette*. I know these baked goods would make Leslie happier than my Sainsbury's purchase last week when I subverted Score 2.

As I exit the bakery, I take out my phone from my backpack and check to see if there any parks or public gardens on any of the routes back home. I walk along a street I have never walked through before and proceed towards Coronation Gardens. The street is lined with recently restructured terraced houses. As I type "terraced," the road in Thornton Heath, where I briefly lived with Rupert and Henrietta when I first moved to London, suddenly



comes to my mind. (And I realize that Rupert and Henrietta's house had escaped my previous address list.) What I recall as a never-ending monotonous road lined with interminable rows of identical houses, from which the pungent smell of curry emanated all day long, remains imprinted in my mind as the quintessential working-class, British, urban dwelling arrangement. The middle-class terraced houses I am passing by today, however, do not even slightly reflect my memories of 1980s South London suburbia.

As I often do when passing terraced rows, I peek through the windows to imagine the lives of the people living in these houses. There are no "artificial, ghastly flowers," I note for myself in an unexpected recollection of a BBC documentary that became an eye-opener for me when I moved to Liverpool in 2013.

*On this prototype sample you have to take, you have to find a sample of people of each A, B, C, E classes, don't you? How do you go about that job?* asked reporter Trevor Philpott in his investigation of class categories in Britain in 1966.

*Well, if we are interviewing out of doors, responded the two women Philpott was questioning, you can assess people by their front doors, by their houses, by their furnishing, curtains, things like that. You can class them and say well, these look like professional people. On the other hand, you can go down the other end of the scale and have lace curtains on the window or rather not quite a well-painted house.*<sup>8</sup>

No lace curtains, "shiny kind of furniture," or "China dogs" visible through the windows in the houses leading up to the park, just a lot of children's decorations suggesting young families and a good number of primary schools in the vicinity. The three Sold signs testify how houses near good schools sell, regardless of the uncertainties that Brexit has cast on the real estate, or property market (Figures 14-15).

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<sup>8</sup> This segment of the 1966 episode, "Not in Our Class, Dear," by Trevor Philpott, was part of the documentary and current affairs program *Man Alive* which ran on the BBC between 1965 and 1981.





Figures 14-15. Photo credit: C. Brazzale

I arrive at the park and stop at the gate. I should stand still for at least five minutes here, but I am uncomfortable in this spot even if the park is empty. I move to the benches in the middle of the park instead. I go in and out of listening to my body and observing the layout of the park with an old school at its edge and mostly dormant vegetation (Fig. 17). I notice yellow daffodils sprouting on the side of a tree and take the phone out of my coat pocket to take a picture. Out of the corner of my eye I see that the dog, which seemed far away a few seconds ago, has reached me. I turn and look down, but the dog has already moved to a different area. I raise my head again to acknowledge its owner; she is looking straight ahead to avoid contact, so I keep to myself. A teenage girl in her school uniform enters the park to take a short cut and walks along the diagonal paved path in what seems to me a strangely slow pace. The woman and the dog exit the park from the opposite gate; while following her path with my eyes, I notice a group of five or six women smoking and chatting by the gate near the school—they appear to be waiting for the children they are in charge of picking up from school.

The wind is rising again, and I am beginning to feel cold. I look at the time on my phone. I have been standing still here for over ten minutes. I have bent the score once again by engaging mostly with visual rather than bodily observations. And, I have almost forgotten about my bag of baked goods! I slowly make my way out of the park from the gate near the school. I pass the disused Boys gate (Figure. 16). At the exit I turn left onto the street and leave behind the secluded quiet of the park as I make my way through the crowd of students waiting for the bus and observe the loud traffic of

Merton Road. I arrive at home, make tea, and share the raspberry tart with J.



Figures 16-17. Photo credit: C. Brazzale

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LS: Not talking on my cell phone while walking is an ideal guided by the Buddhist beliefs about concentration, focus, and presentness which inform my longtime but uneven practice. I regularly fail at my efforts toward full attention to my surroundings and “choiceless awareness,” succumbing to the anxious urgency of needing to check in with my mother, my children, my husband (do we need coffee?), to warn that I’m running late (I just have to pick up a bread and stop at the library....). I admit, I sometimes jump on a bus for a few blocks, so I can make that call or check my email or read the headlines of the *Times* and the *Guardian* in the more forgiving space where my seatmates—who I’d long assumed were reading books online, en masse—are playing Candy Crush, scrolling through epic text messages, and otherwise lowering their heads in a collective physical expression of abjection.

Sometimes I make an exception to my resolution, especially if I’m walking at night, when the streets aren’t as crowded and I feel less self-conscious about my “unseemly” public behavior. Initiating or accepting a well-timed call which I know will become a substantial, or at least long conversation, I feel like I’m taking a walk with a companion, that we’re in an “as-if” floating digital environment. (I do this regularly with a particular friend when one of us has gone to a dance performance and the other has not; each of us calls in the persona of “The Roving Reporter,” generally

speaking in the coded shorthand that cuts to the chase and leaves nuance behind.) As a person for whom embodied experience is critical, this temporary and essentially fictional circumstance of personal interaction is simultaneously magical (however entirely unremarkable it is to fellow fictional walkers) and rather pathetic, a reminder of how easy it is to settle for this “simulacrum” [sic] of intimacy.

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Score 3 by Leslie for Claudia:  
Pay Attention to Your Breathing

Begin at your office at the end of a workday. (Your walk begins here.)

Go down to the lobby, go outside, put your bags down beside you. (If necessary, secure them to yourself.)

Stand still for one to five minutes. Do a body scan, head to feet, finding your alignment. Pick up your bags.

Moving more slowly and deliberately than you usually do after work, walk to the Underground or other public transportation. Ride home, continuing to scan yourself and to view your surroundings.

When you get to your station, walk home, still slowly and attentively.

Enter the house. Put down your bags, say hello to J. (if he's there), and go to your "computer room."

Write.



**CB:** I teach mostly in the evening this term, so Leslie's direction to stand outside the building at work has been difficult to do at night when I am tired, cold, and don't feel entirely safe standing in the dark. There have been incidents of knife violence in the area recently. After a few weeks struggling to do the score, I decide to adjust its starting place. Rather than beginning at my office at the end of a workday, I start outside the building on a day that I cannot enter: today is the second day of a fourteen-day strike that the University and College Union called to address disputes on the universities' failure to make significant improvements “on pay, equality, casualization, and workloads.”<sup>9</sup> When I arrived at the picket line this morning, I noticed my sighing and exhalations, feeling generally hopeless about the marketization of education in this country and my own complicity in it. With the score in mind, I began thinking about my breath in relation to my state of resignation. Butoh dancer Masaki Iwana and his teachings twenty

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<sup>9</sup> In February and March 2020, members of the University and College Union (UCU) across seventy-four UK universities took part in a fourteen-day industrial action, the longest strike in recent university history.

years ago came to mind: “In a state of loss or old age,” he explained at a workshop in Padua, Italy, “exhalations become dominant.”

After two hours standing in the wind and rain, I secretly begin my score. As the picket line begins to dissolve, I stand still for the body scan that my score prescribes. The numbness of my fingers and toes rushes me through the exercise. I decide to continue the scan as I walk towards the station to make my way home. My breath seems invigorated by the three hours spent with colleagues, some of whom I had never a chance to talk to in our compartmentalized disciplines and programs. Dispensing union flyers, playing drums to make noise and keep warm, and simply being together and standing for a different system revitalized my breathing as much as a pranayama session in my yoga practice.

I decide to walk to the station by walking through the old shopping center in Stratford to warm up. I usually speed through the crowds of shoppers, but now I am consciously trying to slow down. I make my way through the corridor between the shops and the market stalls at the center of the building: the “florist” selling plastic flowers; the butcher; the mobile phone repairer; and the two greengrocers arranging fruits and vegetables in their measuring system: the one-for-a-pound clear plastic bowls seen all over London open-air markets. I walk into Stratford Station before rush hour. It is crowded already, but at least it doesn’t have the endless queues that, at times, bring the station to a temporary halt. I proceed up and down several sets of stairs without having anyone run into me, an exception in a city where my sidewalk steering around people often fails, resulting in collisions. I slowly enter the train, making it just in time before the doors close behind me. This is the beginning of the East-to-West Jubilee Line and there are still some seats available. I sit quite tall for the first few stops above the ground. As the train descends deeper underground and crisscrosses the River Thames, my breathing inversely becomes shallower. At the next station, the train fills up quickly, and my phone, picking up the wi-fi connection, alerts me of an incoming WhatsApp message: an update from my sister in Italy about the virus that, after paralyzing most of East Asia, has now unexpectedly and exponentially spread in northern Italy. I slowly sink into my seat and lower my face into my scarf. I return to the score and scan my body: hunched back and consciously keeping my inhalation to a minimum.

I have to spend another fifteen minutes in a packed train 32 meters (105 feet) below sea level, and the temptation to kill time scrolling through the news on social media soon takes over the score and its focus on breathing. My Facebook wall is filled with deranged and conflicting declarations about the virus. The announcement of Waterloo Station interrupts my scrolling. In a frenzy, I pick up my bags, jump out of the train, climb the escalators to street level, turn my phone around to allow the bank card in my case to “touch out” the tube and then again “in” the railway system. At this point my slow, mindful drift home has transformed into the usual rushed trot to make good timing. Hopping on the next departing South Western Railway train, I sit down and go back to the article by philosopher Giorgio Agamben that a few fellow Italian academics shared on Facebook. Expecting an analysis of how Covid-19 is shaking the core of our globalized world, I am surprised to read his critique of the measures taken by the Italian government to contain the spread of the virus as an “unmotivated” emergency used to militarize the nation (Agamben 2020).<sup>10</sup> (In the following days the internationally renowned philosopher will continue to publish articles on the climate of collective panic created by the media and authorities, simply adding to the media overload.)

Although annoyed by the constant polarization of ideas on social media, rather than closing Facebook, I scroll down my wall some more. The app mysteriously works even during the lapses of wi-fi signal while the train is moving, and I am atrophied in my cocooned position: head and chin down, face buried into my scarf, peripheral vision blocked out, thumb sweeping lightly on the phone screen, and eyes following the scroll of images and text. I enjoy increasing the speed of the scroll as a way to avoid any unintentional pausing in yet another erudite polemic or inspirational post about ways to boost the immune system against the virus with a green concoction or a hike in the redwood forest of California. As the train starts speeding up, I suddenly raise my head and look out to see if I’ve missed my stop. The skyline outside, with the tall cranes and chimney of the enormous building sites of Battersea Power station, reassures me.

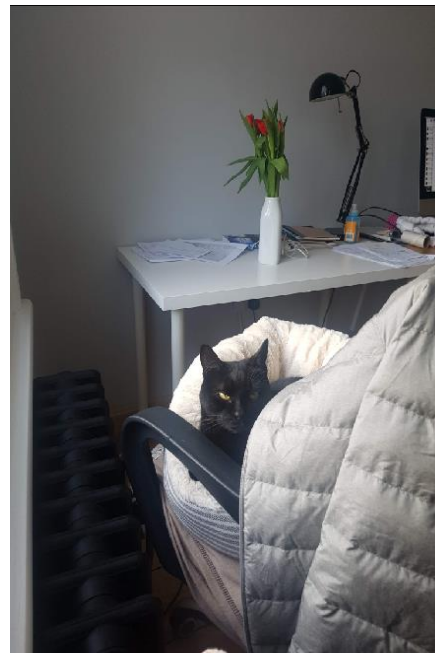
I exit at the next stop, look left and right to spot the nearest stairs, venture down the stairs going against the current of incoming passengers, cross the station through the tunnel that takes me

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<sup>10</sup> The article appeared in *The Manifesto*, a leading left-wing Italian newspaper, on February 25, 2020.



straight out into a small shopping center. As I “tap out,” the unmistakable, intense Lush smell reaches my nose through the scarf wrapped around my face. I walk past the store, looking at their colorful soaps, thinking I really need to give up bottled shower gel and convert to these bright and colorful bars instead. As I continue walking, I relaunch Citymapper to check the times of my buses home. The 39 and 156 are both due now, so I increase my pace, exit the station-shopping center, ignore the guy handing me the free *Evening Standard*, cross the street despite the cars coming towards me. With one last sprint, I hop into the bus, acknowledge the driver with a nod, turn my phone case to touch my debit card to the reader, and head to the second floor of the double-decker to find a seat. My battery is running out; I quickly go into Settings to find the power-saving mode and choose the medium setting which allegedly extends my battery power of 45 minutes. The four different chats I am currently having on WhatsApp and Messenger rapidly eat up my battery. I exit at the Park Tavern stop (Figure 18), pass Londis, Sharif’s, and Franklands. An hour and fifteen minutes later, I am home. I put down my bag, say hello to Chobin and J., go to my computer room, and charge my phone (Figure 19). I sit down and take a deep breath in.



Figures 18-19. Photo credit: C. Brazzale

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LS: While our primary interest here is walking in the digital *city*, we walk in the differently digital *country*, too. “The country” (like “the city”) is a tiny phrase representing a category of place marked by years and layers of historical, contemporary, and sociopolitical meaning-making as well as a range of literal terrain. (Perec acknowledges that his “kind” sees the countryside as “a decorative space surrounding their second home” and admits to his own enjoyment in being there—the bread, the fresh air, the animals and home fires—but concedes that for him, born and bred in towns, “The country is a foreign land” (2008: 68). I, too, am essentially most at home in cities but spend quite a lot of time in the country, not only the urbanite’s nature-recasting respites Perec describes but an exploration emerging from a deeper, enduring love of the outdoors, especially walking in fields, forests, and mountains. I particularly love hiking in the high country of Northern New Mexico, briefly considered here in terms of cell-phone technology: the apps that have shifted my treks.

These hikes are central to my evolving relationship to New Mexico, where I have a long personal history and a kind of parallel life that I maintain through the usual cell phone talk/text/photo mix most of the year and jump into full tilt for the summer. I hike with my friends and family, going out almost daily, making the decision early every morning about which trail to take. The Borrego again? Chamisa got trashed; it’s too hard to maneuver. No Picacho if it looks like rain—you remember that time....

Some trails are full of mushrooms, some are full of memories. Every summer for decades, D. and I have taken photographs of ourselves at a particular rock formation high up on the Aspen Vista Trail. For years, we brought our cameras, and our picture-taking was an elaborate comedy of timers and rushing smile-ready into our designated spots. Now, of course, we have our cell phones, and take *many* photos—selfies—at those rocks, and of those astonishing vistas. We shoot as we walk, taking photos of the flowers, the piñon and juniper trees, the enormous expanses of land and sky, noticing and documenting the ways the topography has changed in the face of flood, fire, disease. When we see a plant we don’t recognize, we stop and consult a plant app, like Picture This, which confirms the image we send it and spits back a species and a Latin and common-English name and a description, history, likely locales, and related flora.

It would never occur to me to make a phone call on the trail, but I’ve here and there answered one (the cell service is often weirdly excellent), and we’ve been annoyed on hikes by occasional loud cell phone talkers. But last summer, when an experienced mushroom-hunting hiker friend got

turned around and lost after going a bit off-trail, the phone was a literal life-saver: Our friend called Search and Rescue and then me, and we all stayed in touch, and after several harrowing hours she was found and guided out. Later, other friends debated the merits of multiple digital safeguards and precautionary measures, from Find Your Phone to apps suggesting a hiker's version of Life Alert ("I've fallen and I can't get up"); as I recall, Search and Rescue suggested packing a couple of sandwiches, plenty of water, and a really loud whistle.

I keep coming back to two things: One, I hike for the unimaginable beauty and quiet, the pleasure of the extreme pulmonary and muscular exertion and of the rhythms of each repetition of one foot after the other in the thin air high above sea level, and the opportunity to dwell in them, to be fully present. Every research form, of course, is an interruption of the experience of walking itself, even taking notes with pen and paper or consulting a book of local plants, but using the cell phone and its digital cousins feels compulsive, addictive, outwardly driven, and profoundly intrusive. Two, I realize periodically that I have a huge collection of photographs of me, of us, in the country. We have literal and metaphoric piles of analog and digital data, selectively created and accumulated self-documentation suggesting that we live in the country, not in the city, that we are people of leisure rather than members of the work force (however privileged, or lucky). Through what feels like second-nature (pun intended) mediation, we create at least partly unintentional autofictions. As Jo Spence pointed out, we tend not to take (or have taken) photographs of ourselves when we're at work or involved in mundane or everyday activities (1986). Roland Barthes noted that he composed himself for photos, creating an ideal version of himself: "I transform myself in advance into an image" (1980: 10). As a couple, D. and I embark on a joint performance of ourselves, our best selves in league with the land through which we walk.

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**LS:** I rarely take photographs with my cell phone when I walk in NYC. This is rooted in the ways I distinguish my NYC life from my elsewhere life. When I travel or hike, I'm on high alert, dedicated to looking, seeing, noticing, and photographing...exploring churches (why don't I go into churches when I walk in Manhattan?) or plants (I sometimes look at flower-boxes in the West Village, but hardly ever investigate the species of trees and street plants I don't recognize. My main memory of Prague is its barren treelessness.) On home ground, I so easily drift into the knotted neuro(tic)-wires of preoccupations, feelings, thoughts, and errands while



the materiality of my surroundings blurs into background. I take photographs only when an image pops out from that undifferentiated enormousness into my consciousness. In NYC I don't check my heart app for ongoing information about the distance I've covered or the number of steps I've taken, either as an act of self-portraiture or competition (with yesterday's info, with my walking partner). I take photographs only when an image pops out from that undifferentiated enormousness into my consciousness—such as the one here, a newly relevant physician's license plate whose message is an abbreviated version of the Yiddish term, *Zeigzunt*, which translates, roughly, to a kind of benediction: "May you be healthy" (Figure 20).



Figure 20. Photo credit: L. Satin

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Score 3 by Claudia for Leslie:  
Still Standing

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Start from your house, or your office, or from the dance studio where you take classes now.

Walk to the first landmark point I would recognize as 'still standing' *despite* ...

On your way to where you are going, record on your phone or on your mind how you would describe the landmark without naming it.

When you have a minute, write down what you recorded/what you remember and send it to me in whatever form (a picture of your writing on paper; a word document via email; or a text).



**LS:** I start from my house, but because I'm running late, I take the bus to Fifth Avenue, partway to where I'm headed: a landmark that Claudia will immediately recognize. (The score indicates that I should omit the name, but there's not much to guess at.) I'm going to a performance, one of the Monday evening events at \_\_\_\_\_ Church which continue the legacies of the 1960s pioneers of post-modern dance, the Church itself (which has been active in progressive arts and politics since before those dancers performed there), and Movement Research (MR), the organization central to the continuation of experimental dance in NYC.<sup>11</sup> I go fairly often to these events, usually have a complicated and mixed experience (see the Roving Reporter story a few pages back), and always feel grateful for MR and my community. On the bus, I see a man who somewhat resembles Steve Paxton (whose work has been deeply significant to the development of contemporary dance since the Judson Dance Theater in the early 1960s) and who I know is going where I am; he *always* goes. I don't know his name, and we've never spoken. I pretend not to notice him; he presumably is pretending not to notice me. It's a cold night, and we're both bundled up. When we get off the bus at Fifth Avenue, we race-walk, on opposite sides of the street, to the Church.

As I almost-run, head lowered, I try to focus on the Church's appearance, move into its history (Stanford White and all that—see the Church's website) and the communiques I've had with the Church's administrators this week. I think, too, of how much I want my

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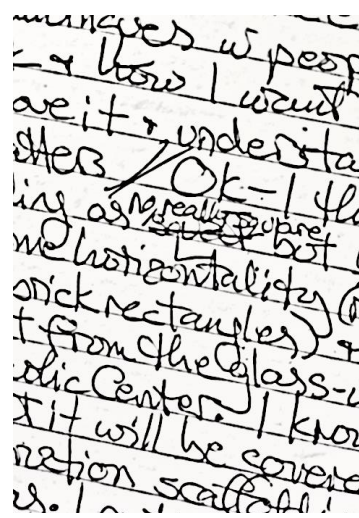
<sup>11</sup> The building to which I refer is Judson Memorial Church. See the bibliography for the Judson website.

students to love this place, to acknowledge its history and its importance. I think of the building itself, on West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, or Washington Square South, and Thompson Street, across from the glass-walled NYU Catholic Center, as square-ish and beautiful, tan—gold, really—with a sense of horizontality: the long lines of its linked bricks rather than the brick-grid itself. And there are lovely, tall stained-glass windows with curved tops on the second floor of both walls (Thompson, West 4<sup>th</sup>), and darkened windows, rectilinear, on the first floor, and a circular window above the doors and a cross above that. Most of this, I know, will be covered by construction scaffolding. (It is.) I know that there will be signs and posters along the north-facing wall, and a philosophical plaque; this evening, it turns out to say:

REACH DOWN INTO THAT DEEP PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE INSIDE YOURSELF AND TOUCH THE TERROR OF DIFFERENCE THAT LIVES THERE. SEE WHOSE FACE IT WEARS.—AUDRE LORDE.

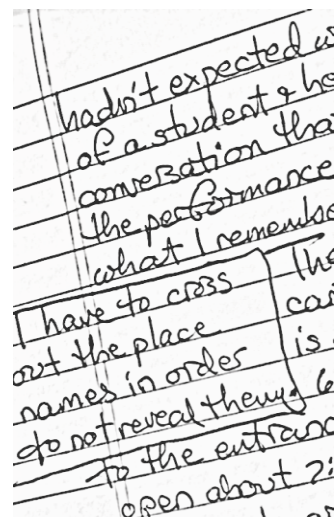
I find this sobering and focusing.

I enter the building, say hi to a few people, and sit somewhere with moderately acceptable sightlines, hoping that the guy in front of me with a high ponytail will slouch and his companion will remove his brimmed hat. (Neither happens.) I usually stand in the back or strategically re-plant my chair, but I know I need to write, to scrawl the words that I've been thinking while concentrating on this landmark and that will become the words you have just read. As the score decrees, I later send cell-phone photos of these words to Claudia (Figures 21-22).



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region scaffolding  
... I ...

Figures 21-22 Photo credit: L. Satin



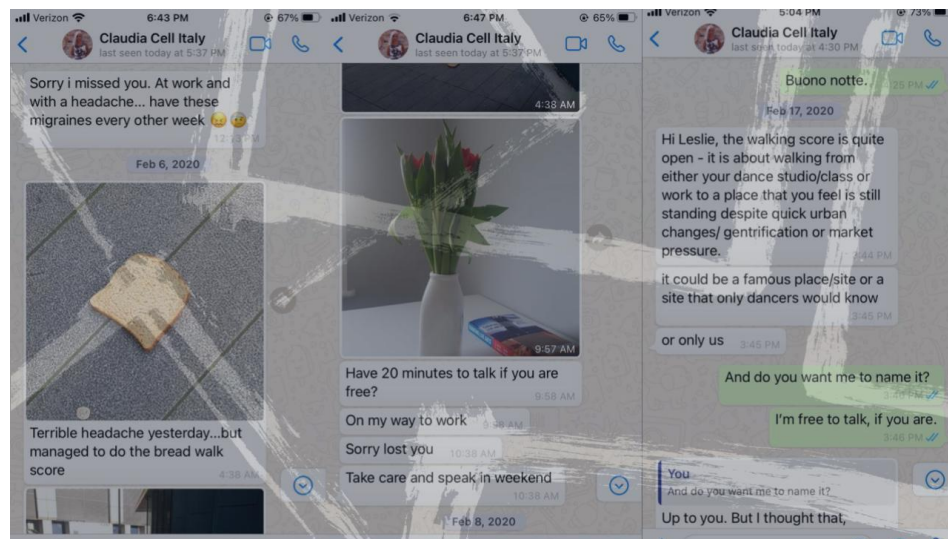
hadn't expected us  
of a student & he  
conversation tho  
the performance  
what I remember  
I have to cross  
out the place  
names in order  
do not reveal they  
to the entrance  
open about 2:  
... ..

**Post-script 1:** As I furiously write, hoping to get my mental notes onto the paper, a student of mine and her sister, just landed from Tokyo, find and join me. I am delighted to see them but get frazzled by the interruption of my score completion. Recognizing this as obsessive and ungenerous, I take a breath, and engage with my companions.

**Post-script 2:** A day later, I cheat, and fill in what I know I would have thought about and described if I had been more focused. There are two sets of steps: the five or so outdoor steps leading to the entrance doors, which typically open at 7:45, where the first audience members to arrive hang out, standing or sitting; and the inside staircase, with bannisters, all warm dark wood, which leads down to the restrooms and up to the sanctuary/performance space.

I love to walk up these steps, comfortable in the structure of the evening and the pleasurable not-knowing of what will happen once the lights go down. Walking into the space, I turn off my cell phone.

\*



LS: *And, do you want me to name it?*

CB: *Up to you. But I thought that, perhaps it would be better to leave it open ended.*

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## About the Authors

**Claudia Brazzale**, a scholar, choreographer, and performer, is a Senior Lecturer and a joint-Programme Leader for the MA in Contemporary Performance Practices at the University of East London. She has taught at Liverpool Hope University, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Princeton University, Rutgers University, and the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) and has held positions as a Visiting Scholar at the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Analysis at London South Bank University and the Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University (IRW). In 2010-11 Claudia was the recipient of a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the American Association University of Women to support her research at IRW (2010-11). Claudia's work focuses on the seduction and consequences of mobility. Centred on feminist ethnographic methodologies, her research engages with the body in relation to the global flows of traditional dance forms; cosmopolitanism and globalisation; fashion, the body, and consumer culture; space, place, and migration. Claudia holds a Ph.D. in Cultures and Performance from UCLA and an MA in Performance Studies from NYU.

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