

Really I must buy a [pencil](#).

‘And here - let us examine it tenderly, let us touch it with reverence - is the only spoil we have retrieved from all the treasures of the city, a lead [pencil](#).’ Virginia Woolf on street haunting.

In the writing of this text I have visited/
not visited many places.

Online/offline.

Virtually/in reality.

Read this text however you would like.
Read it in an order, read the sentences in
lines, read across the text,
read it however you desire.

Make a shortcut, cut through it, make
yourself an alleyway, dwell for longer on
the parts that catch your eye.

This text is all edges, this text is the
space past the outline, but it's right in
front of you.

Online I have walked for four and a half
hours through London.

Offline I have walked for an hour each
day, starting and ending at my house.

You don't need instruction on how to
read, you don't need instruction on how
to walk. You have the freedom to read
however you would like, you can move
however you would like. Mary Paterson
looks at the relationship between live art
and its audiences writes in her text, *A
Navigation Through Unbound*, 'Read this
text paragraph by paragraph; and/ or line
by line; and/ or one word at a time,
chosen by accident.'

Although, sometimes instruction is good,
if you don't know where to start. Take
Robert Macfarlane for example, his
instruction for a walk is used at the
beginning of *Psychogeography*. 'Unfold a
street map of London, place a glass, rim
down, anywhere on the map, and draw
round its edge. Pick up the map, go out
into the city, and walk the circle, keeping
as close as you can to the curve. Catch
the textual run-off of the streets; the
graffiti, the branded litter, the snatches
of conversation. Cut for sign. Log the data
stream. Be alert to the happenstance of
metaphors, watch for visual rhymes,
coincidences, analogies, family
resemblances, the changing moods of
the street. Complete the circle and the
record ends. Walking makes for content:
footage for footage.'

Even in the 'space' there is something.
Percy observes, 'There's nothing
ectoplasmic about space; it has edges, it
doesn't go off in all directions, it does all
that needs to be done for railway lines to
meet well short of infinity'. Just because
you think of the space as the outer edges
does not mean that nothing is there.

I walk.
I stop.
I wait.
I walk.

I live on a line that is unclear,
yet I follow it unfalteringly.
Trapped in the lines that I travel,
I cannot deviate,
it is set.

I like to take trips.
Not long ones, usually only a day.
Sometimes I stay for two,
in an attempt to break away from the
lines.

I walk in length around the harbour.
Standing looking out to sea, watching big
boats glide across the horizon.
Mrs Booth stands next to me.
We talk together for a while until a
couple come around the corner, they look
at me oddly.
*I don't want to be stuck on the same line
like Mrs Booth* I think,
as I get on my train home.

But what about the paths we make for
ourselves? The paths we make in our
desire to live outside of these grids.

The walk from the station to my house
passes me by. Before I know it I'm
looking in my bag for my keys; they're in
my pocket.

In *Flâneuse*, Lauren Elkin says, 'I walk
because I like it. I like the rhythm of it.
Walking is mapping with your feet. Walk-
ing helps me feel at home.
Sometimes I walk because I have things
on my mind. I walk because it confers-
or restores-a feeling of *placeness*.'
Well, I walk to get to places, I walk
because I have the time, I walk to see, I
walk for an hour, I walk to the shops, I
walk around the block, I walk on boxing
day, I walk because I like it.

The description of the street is one
universally understood, we have all
moved in these spaces. We follow the
lines laid out for us. In *Species of Spaces
and Other Pieces*, we are run through the
layout of the street, 'The parallel
alignment of two series of
buildings defines what is known as a
street. The street is a space bordered,
generally on its two longest sides, by
houses; the street is what separates
houses from each other, and also what
enables us to get from one house to
another, by going either along across the
street.'. This is not unfamiliar. Without
even taking it in we move in the grid
already set for us.

Ann Carrington was commissioned to
make *Mrs Booth* in 2009. Turner would
stay with Mrs Booth when he went to
Margate and they eventually lived with
one another until his death. Mrs Booth
stands forever looking at 'the sea and sky
beloved of Turner'.

Robert Macfarlane describes *desire* paths
as 'freewill ways'. Paths that are made
over time by the desire of the walker to
wander and create their own way away
from the designs and plans of the city. If
you take a walk around your city or town
you will start to notice them everywhere.
You probably take these paths without
even realising, an easy way to get home,
cut across the grass and miss out the
pavement.

I overhear a conversation between two women and a man in the Britannia Inn. They are sitting down for lunch and sheltering from the storm outside, having liver and bacon pie for lunch with mash, not chips.

The lifts took you up so quick my ears popped on the way and my stomach dropped on the way down...it was foggy, we couldn't see much but we have been to the top...

And the pier before the fire, have you ever been? Went to the end, I leant over and saw the wooden stilts, holding me up, over the water, played the 2p slots and went back to the hotel...

I took the grandkids up the old lighthouse last summer, you can see the new one from the top, it's very steep mind but I was determined, you know, what's the point in visiting these places if you don't go to the top, if you don't go to the top, don't go to the end, you've not really been, complete the circuit, earn the badge, power hums along the lines, we hum along the lines.

But what if we forgot about the verticals and horizontals. Play with the space and ooo here we go, yep he ordered the pie with mash, mines just with salad.

Italo Calvino in *Invisible Cities*, 'Nothing of the city touches the earth except those long flamingo legs on which it rests...'. A pier is an extension of the land, a protrusion of timber and concrete, or as Farley and Roberts put it, '...pieces of England stepping in to the snotgrey Irish Sea...'. You can walk out and along, getting further and further from the land, but not. Walk out into the sea, stay bone dry. Drink your hot chocolate on an incoming wave. You look through the wooden slats down into the underbelly, 'ancient, decayed, like a beached shipwreck.'. The pier acts as a horizontal skyscraper, we look out the end on to the sea as we would look out a window onto a sprawling city scape.

In Dungeness there is a lack of pier. The land simply drops off into the sea. A bench sits at the end of a long wooden walk way that takes you out to the very edge. Just because it is the end of the line does not make it any less. Power hums along the lines, Derek Jarman says, '...to keep the fish and chips a-frying.' It seems to me a place of ends, a final destination, the edge of the land.

M.C Escher's engravings have no ending, horizontals and verticals become one, you must get used to, as Perec says, 'a state of weightlessness' There is no end to a line, no point of completion. You move forward. The lines bend and go back on themselves.

When I return, nothing new.
The buildings that stand have stood still
since the 1930s.

This place was not made for walking.
But I persist, making my way up the busy
road through the fumes and traffic, I need
to get to the shops before they close.

A propeller. A jet.
An engine. A soft rumbling
that starts in the distance and
draws closer.
Muting everything.
Drowning out any other noise.

It passes over head and the sound starts
to ebb,
but not before the rumbling starts again.

A line is present in the grass.
A patch worn down on the hill from eager
trainers.
They sit on fold out chairs, lining the edge
of the field.
Flask in one hand, camera in the other.
I stand on the hill rocking from one foot
to the other.
A plane goes over into land,
hands go up to faces,
cameras are lifted,
knees bend and lift bodies upward.
This repeats every minute or so.

I feel as if I am a spectator to the
spectating of plane spotting.

The Golden Mile is the name of the
stretch of the Great West Road north of
Brentford. Most of the buildings there
were built in the 1930s for industry
purposes, some now stand empty, others
have been repurposed as studios for
production companies or are used as car
show rooms. No one really walks around
here, unless it is to get to work or down
to the canal.

In 1997 Wolfgang Tillmans took to plane
watching and photographed the concorde,
a turbojet plane. ‘...to watch it in the air,
landing or taking-off is a strange and free
spectacle, a super modern anachronism
and an image of desire to overcome time
and distance through technology.’ To walk
is to have no desire to overcome time or
distance but rather to take in all that is
around you.

When visiting the flight path there is the
feeling that the line the planes are
travelling on can be seen. Lining
yourself up in front of them, they arrive,
one after the other. This line is made
physical in the walking of the flight path,
I found a blog online of a man who is an
avid walker, ‘Arriving planes funnel in to
a focal point near Fulham, then follow a
rigid westward line across the suburbs for
eight miles before touching down. Half
the time they arrive on the northern run-
way, 27R, and half the time they arrive on
the southern runway, 27L.’

In Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting: A
London Adventure*, she walks the streets
of London, catching glimpses into other
lives. ‘Into each of these lives one could
penetrate a little way, far enough to give
oneself the illusion that one is not
tethered to a single mind, but can put
on briefly for a few minutes the bodies
and minds of others.’ Watching the plane
spotters watching the planes it is easy to
become muddled in my act as a
spectator, I find myself watching the
planes and reacting, and watching the
reactions of plane spotters react to the
planes overhead.

I walk down the slope in low tide. 3 steps are visible, disappearing into the brown water. The mud either side looks as if it is in perpetual motion, sliding continuously, in deep waves, high crevices.

This land is [fleeting](#).

I have only ever seen these steps twice.
Only been once,
and will probably never return.
There is no proof of another [before](#) me,
and my footprints will disappear at [23:26](#).

Across from me are [archways](#).
Pressed deep into the stone.
Rising up up up out of the water.
I imagine myself under these archways.
My feet slipping and sinking into the muddy bank, hands gripping at the brick.
The estuary licks at my feet, beckoning me in.
Big enough for me,
but not big enough for two.

High above is a bridge, ferrying people to and from the city centre.
To my left and right I see [bridges](#), some straight, some arched.
Some wooden, some metal, suspended high above the water.

Running, walking, cycling.
Somewhere to be.
I stand beneath, listening to the heavy foot fall, breathing in the smell of the low tide.
The thick pervasive smell of the mud, the heady smell of fauna, warming up in the sun.
Across and up, two people sit out on their balcony watching the travellers on the bridge, watching the cars go by, watching me watching them.

The surrounding area of the estuary is [fleeting](#). The water rises up twice a day to wash away all that was before. In *The Edge Of The Sea*, Carson talks about the joining of the land and the sea, 'I felt a strong sense of interchangeability of land and sea in this marginal world of the shore, and of the links between the life of the two. There was also an awareness of the past and of the continuing flow of time, obliterating much that had gone [before...](#)'.

04:53 2.86 Low Tide
11:08 9.53 High Tide
18:20 3.21 Low Tide
[23:26](#) 9.5 High Tide
Estuary tides for the 22.4.20.

'The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,' Marco answers, but by the line of the [arch](#) that they form.' Calvino conjures up images of majestic towering buildings, maze like cities, layers upon layers of intricate detail. It forces me to look at my own city, to search out the beauty in every stone that builds an arch, that builds a bridge.

In Patrick Keiller's film, *London*, we are taken on a journey through the city. Shown shop fronts, canals, office blocks, parks, [bridges](#). Our journey is narrated by a past lover of Robinson's. The narrator recites Rimbauds poem *The Bridges*, 'some straight, some arched, others descending at oblique angles to the first', as we are shown foot and vehicle bridges crossing Londons Thames. Robinson is a flâneur. A person that meanders, catching the textual run-off of the street. The term flâneur was described by Baudelaire, in the 1800s, as, 'a gentleman stroller of the streets'. Virginia Woolf called herself a 'street haunter' and women have used the word 'flâneuse', for their own version of psychogeography. This is maybe an issue for another text, to think of the women that haunt the streets, observing and taking notes...

An [alleyway](#) is a secret.
Known only to the locals of the area. A small, narrow passage between the houses, between the gardens. It would not be seen unless someone was caught entering one end or appearing from another.

I remember it so clearly, as if I am standing at the entrance of it.

Two thirds of the way down the dead end road.

Not the only [alleyway](#) out of this street but the most used.

It's about thirty metres long and about one and a half metres wide.

Half-way down on both sides there is a break in the wall,
a gap to chuck your rubbish in.

There is always an upturned trolley or a black bin bag of clothes, lying strewn across the path.

I always look for [alleyways](#).
And I always take them.

Suddenly there's a shortcut. A cheat. I move off the map, into a secret.
Slip to the edge.
Not a path of my own making,
but it will do.

I spent my childhood hanging around this [alleyway](#), in the dead end street, a safe place for kids to play, no cars passing through. In *Edgelands* the feeling of this space is put perfectly into words, 'We might have come up with the term 'edgelands' ourselves. Anyone who has spent a childhood mooching around the fringes of English towns and cities, where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders, might have come up with the word. If you know those places where overspill housing estates break into scrubland, wasteland; if you know these underdeveloped, unwatched territories, you know that they have 'edge'.

Thinking of [alleyways](#) made me think of Mark Leckey's show at the Tate Britain in 2019/20. One day in December I spent a couple of hours, sat on a wooden floor, under a motorway bridge on the M53, in the centre of London. The feeling of nostalgia was so overwhelming. Days and nights spent hanging around with no where to go. The spaces that we can call 'edgelands' are spaces that people are pushed into and that are often forgotten. After the alleyway is the garage on the corner and after that is the business park and after that the retail park, all edgelands. I don't need to be there, I can walk it in my mind. I know it like the back of my hand, which I know pretty well.

In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino muses on how quickly the places we know so well can become simply a background image, 'For everyone, sooner or later, the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer detach it from the cobblestones.'

Search for an [alleyway](#). Explore a place, see somewhere in a new way. Take a left. Take every alleyway you come across. Find something unexpected. Take a pencil and record what you see, what you hear, what you smell. Taking the shortcut, can often lead to a long way. It is an edgeland that is in plain site.

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