

The background of the image is a photograph of the front of a heavily rusted and weathered car. The car is dark-colored, possibly black or dark grey, and shows significant signs of decay, with large areas of rust and peeling paint. On top of the car, there is a dense growth of green plants with small, bright pink flowers. The scene is set outdoors, with more foliage visible in the background.

so we must meet

apart

Jesa Suganob
Vince Imbat

so we must meet

apart



Iponan River Dike
Pyrex Street
Barra, Opol

12 August 2023

Dear V,

When I walk, I avert my eyes from strangers' gazes. Yet this be the case, I gawk at faraway bodies from my vantage point whose lives can only transpire in the frame of these photographs. It gives me reprieve to not get caught. To see eye to eye is one of the things that frighten me even outside of these walks. I would usually hide behind a mask of indifference, fearing that my gaze would confer invitation to whoever I am gazing at.

Today, a group of boys try to catch fish with a large net by the river. Elders hung by the railways to chatter or sip coffee. Two women jog alongside their five dogs. A man runs with a beeping heart rate monitor. Talk about religion comes up, which brings your essay about extricating your faraway past from your nearby past come to mind.

I pass by an expensive coffee shop blasting loud 90s pop music in a gentrified side of this subdivision. A nearby bahay kubo plays 60s music and its neighboring bahay kubo plays 2000s music. A cow tries to keep off the flies from its back. Someone brings notice to the lush kalamunggay drooping from the rails of the dike. I am thinking about how I only noticed that this river dike is populated by so much sound.

Looking at the murkiness of the river that I once imparted with you during the workshop, I began to wonder how deep it is, if it is deep enough to make me drown. I've told you about my suicidal ideations before, and I've once chosen this particular river to kill myself with a pocketful of stones last year. Nothing's going

to happen now, of course. As I look at my neighbors swimming in its muddied body, I realized that it's not that deep after all. Probably just on the level of my hips. The tides could get particularly frightful during storms though. Without the dike, it could easily swallow our house whole.

I took a stopover to smoke and I gawked at the birds in migration, birds bathing and drinking by the dirty water, wondering if, as a poet once said, the only thing charting their path is that of warmth. I happen upon glass shards, probably smashed in the midst of a drunken spat. There's also a skeleton of a truck. Above my head, a swarm of gamu-gamo flutter around. I encounter a kalabaw on the way. There's no plantation in the place. I wonder if it's being reared for slaughter.

A lot of things are happening in this place, even though one might not ascribe these happenings as events, perhaps only mere instances. Nonetheless, I am drawn to what happens in the moment of this instant. Most days I have no care for history, be it that of the body or the capital H of history. There were a lot of things that I used to care about, but sitting on this river one afternoon last year amidst a depressive episode, I realized how ironic it was to want to save the world without even knowing how to hold my own fort. "Sometimes you need to forget to survive," a friend once advised me in the wake of Chad Booc's demise. What you see now isn't indifference; it's a survival tactic.

I am thinking about what you said about how Los Baños never makes you feel lonely. I look around me and see a lot of people and wonder why I feel so lonely. It was Lefebvre himself who said that all space are products, and even this so-called suburban loneliness that I've spoken of is a consequent by-product of the cruel reality of being relegated to the outskirts of the city. However,

doesn't it make you feel lonely too, with nothing but words and commentaries on detritus as contents of my dispatch to you?

At the end of the dike, someone greets me good afternoon and I utter back a weak response, confused if it was a genuine remark. I am hypervigilant; for me, everything leads back to the body, be it the body of this place, the river across my place, or the vertiginous aftermath of my allocentric lock. I'd like to believe that it was the world's way of saying that it's not so bad here after all. I hope to see more glimpses of this beauty in my future walks.

On the midst of heading home, I encountered the same man who uttered me the greeting. He tells me how familiar I look, and he recognized me, apparently, as the daughter of my mother. (For context, my mother runs a clinic beside our home.) It's eerie to have strangers recognize me without me recognizing them. When I take these walks, I assume the figure of an anonymous stranger, and it was a bit of a terrifying ordeal to actually be known while I take my solitary walks. We exchange a few greetings and we parted with a smile. I am left with more questions to myself after that interaction but I head home uttering nothing to my parents nonetheless.

Living Room
Pyrex Street
Barra, Opol

August 17, 2023

Dear V,

I'm thinking about the walks we take to accept compromise and cede to defeat. The kind of long walks we take to clear our heads and just agree to disagree so as to not further exacerbate a relational spat. How many steps does it take to arrive at a point where the body stops trembling from heightened arousal?

As I told you when I wrote about you in one of my blogs, walking feels like a sort of penitence for me. Unlike prey animals, we can't easily shake off the shock for when we're preyed on for someone's next meal. I don't have it in me to regulate my nervous system properly. Consider it as an after effect of my complex PTSD, as diagnosed by my psychiatrist. I am repenting for feeling the feelings that I almost cannot bear to carry.

These past few days, it's been raining. I would love to take a walk while writing but instead I'm writing this dispatch in our living room while sipping coffee. I'd like to think of these meditations also as a walking of sorts, as the burden of the mind comes to an ease once I've transfigured these worries into words.

Writing to you brings me so much reprieve. It's like kneeling on a confessional. This correspondence is a letter to the void, after all.

I am writing to the wind. The moment it arrives to you, I am finally heard. The moment it is put into paper, I am finally seen. In having these words read by others, I am finally seen for my sins.

It's a dreary Thursday. I can't help but identify with the weather today. Grey and gloomy. One thing I forgot to tell you: I take walks to escape the melancholy in the house. Writing this from the living room reminds me of an essay you recounted about taking walks within one's home. It seemed like an interesting venture.

Houses house memories, to cite Gaston Bachelard. There are rooms within myself that I intend to knock on and rediscover. And, to quote Rainer Maria Rilke, "Have patience with all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like closed rooms, like books written in a foreign language."

I hope, in one way or another, my corrugated language touches upon you.

Data–Ruby–Bulusan–Pearl–Banahaw–Diamond–Santos–Lopez–
Ela–Dawis–Aglibut–Pili–Argaños–Madamba–Viado–Pancho–
Juliano–Lantican–Velasco–Ruby–Onyx–Data

18 August 2023

Dear J,

I hate to say this. But if there's another way to break the monotony of daily existence, I'll do that instead of this. If there's another way to see magenta turn to orange and back, I would do that instead of this. If I could stay where I am and wake up old and say, "I lived well," I would do that instead of this.

And yet due to a lack of options, I walk.

I mean, just now, I passed by Meister's and I could've been born just to be sitting on one of those chairs at this very moment. And yet here I am. Walking. Can you imagine that?

I mean, it was as if everything that has ever happened to me, every person I've ever met (yes, that includes you!), conspired to make sure that on this August afternoon—magenta contra orange—I walk.

SM Mall
Pueblo de Oro
Cagayan de Oro City

August 18, 2023

Dear V,

I've been feeling sullen since yesterday, gloomy as the weather. No amount of walking could sate the emptiness inside me. It takes and takes even though it has nothing else to take, like an ulcer of the mind.

I walked more than 3,000 steps today while I carry the greyness of the weather with me. The strolls I took were languorous. The asphalt thumps with my every step. Unlike yours, there is no state of becoming nor entering a liminal state in this walk; it's just pure penitence.

While writing this dispatch outside a restaurant, I ponder about the ways I can sate this emptiness. It's ensconced in a fearful language that intends to repeat and reiterate itself.

If, as Wittgenstein said, the end of my language is the end of my world, in what ways could I possibly teach this body a new vocabulary? It has been closed off from the light for so long, as if an apparition, as if a ghostly archive.

Consider, the dearth of language and the loudness of gestures; I am learning even while I am not uttering myself into this language; I am attenuated, even while mute. I sometimes wonder if the disparate ways that my body quivers in intimate encounters would color this barren language from its otherwise gloomy color.

Within me are rooms I've long locked out of shame. I'm now trying to knock on some of them, hoping to reconnect with parts of myself that I've disconnected from. It takes a toll walking from

room to room, only to be disappointed by the wordlessness of its world inside. Does a barren mouth make a barren house?

I've forgotten the skill it took to sit with myself. Nonetheless, I continue to hope in the reprieve that writing these dispatches brings. Wherever you are, I am grateful that you're listening.

Data–Sierra Madre Ext.–Sierra Madre–Onyx–Ruby–Velasco–Ela–
Pili–IPB–NLAI–Pili–Ela–Tiongson–Velasco–Ruby–Data

19 August 2023

Dear J,

Spent the entire day thinking about lyric essays, and it led me to this walk. There is a fine line that separates walking and writing. An essay is a walk. The more it meanders the more it tries to become an essay. That is to say, the more it tries to try.

Thinking about all of these brought me back to a question, ungraspable: Why do some of us speak in a straight line while some meander? And this leads me to another question I've been wanting to ask you: Why be agnostic?

Writing this, I realized, is sort of meandering on its own. But I am compelled to ask, because for more than half of my life, I survived without any need for poetry. I survived without needing to try—to meander. I mean, it's like when I asked my friend the other day if she reads poems and she said, "If I like it, I like it." It's like walking without asking yourself why. So I ask, "Why now? What happened?"

...

When do we realize that our choice to meander involves life or death?

A new tarp hangs outside the St. Therese chapel. She died yesterday. She was 64.

Block 44 Lot 25
Lapis Street
Barra, Opol

August 19, 2023

Dear V,

What does the body know outside of wanting? I've traversed rooms in my house recently and found no answer. Yesterday I knocked on a room I've long shut and I was met with unrelenting violence. I am queasy with how I've gotten used to the shrieks, mistaking them for the silent stares of the walls. Our walls bear witness to the tragedies in these rooms but we cannot ask them to testify nor affirm the onslaught for us; all they can do is stare back.

I am trying to understand how the body fits in this story. For now, it slinks back to the cracks and cowers until the noise echoes away.

...

I am trying to be present in someone else's home without backing down to the corner.

The room that I'm currently in is bright. It is filled with joyous, rapturous laughter. I find myself trapped in my own house despite being in these people's company. It is never grey here no matter how humid the wind is. Even if a storm passes by, everyone easily bounces back. All there is, at least, is light. I'd like to feel like I belong here. I laugh alongside them but deep inside I feel hollow. Nonetheless, it is wonderful here. If only I could leave this body, I would have already moved out and lived here. I am sick of the walls in my home. I want to take them down and demolish the house altogether. I want to build in its stead something new.

Albeit a scream to the void, I appreciate these letters. It helps me feel less lonely. I hope you're doing good wherever you're walking.

Data–Sierra Madre Ext.–Sierra Madre–Onyx–Ruby–Velasco–
Lantican–Pancho–Juliano–F Park–Cuzner–Lopez–Santos

21 August 2023

Dear J,

Weird—but walking, to me, has become interchangeable with stopping. It's like coming home tired, I chose to play a game on my phone rather than, say, nap. It's rest via motion—which invites me to ponder: How does this epoch we are unfortunate to be part of understand quiescence? Are we still even somnolent? Do intervals still exist? Do we still even take time to dream?

Tell me, do you do the same when you write? Do you write to rest? It doesn't seem like it. Often, especially when I'm being careless, writing easily becomes a chore. But that, I guess, is the quandary we chose: identities are so blurred these days we are in crisis almost every moment. Boundaries are so unclear and so we allow ourselves to be hurt more often than we can tolerate.

The fish vendor closes shop late to accommodate late buyers but wakes up early to accommodate early buyers. She can't separate herself from the very fish she is selling.

When I asked Vincenz what he plans to do with walking, he responded with no hesitance, "I just want to try the food at Quiapo." I was surprised to hear such a lucid answer and insisted on getting a more esoteric one. I couldn't accept that after being inspired by all the feedback I got from the workshop—already planning all the walks to come in my head—here was someone, who had walked more streets than I ever had, saying that he walks to eat Chinese food that he may have eaten many times already.

And so I asked him again. He repeated his answer but with a half smile—his teeth glued to each other, his voice hissing out of enamel crevices—and a look that was miffed in a funny way.

Finally sensing my desire to be taught, he indulged. He went on to tell me that in his walks, the person who walks is just a persona he created. He said that he doesn't have to be that persona all the time. In other words, Vincenz knows his boundaries. In other words, Vincenz knew I was being a fish.

Data–Ruby–Bulusan–Pearl–Banahaw–Diamond–Santos–Lopez–
Ela–Pili–Roxas–Pancho–Juliano–Lantican–Velasco–Ruby–Onyx–
Data

22 August 2023

Dear J,

You said you walk the same paths and come to them a stranger every time. I say I walk the same paths and they come to me as a stranger every time.

The cats in front of Meister's, for instance, come and go. When I first came here, the clowder occupying that space consisted of a petite calico and two tortoise toms—one big, one small. I wrote a story in my head that the clowder was father, mother, and son. Like most toms, the father was the first to go. Eventually, the calico also left. I would later see her twice: once along Bulusan, still near Meister's, and once along F. O. Santos where it could've scavenged in several eateries.

The little tortoise tom, who was just a kitten when I first saw him, raised itself, often resting inside an electric meter cage shielded by the bosky branches of bougainvilleas. I fed him as often as I could and even thought of adopting him if my vet didn't discourage me from doing so. She said adopting another stray cat would disrupt and bring disease to my own clowder back at home, which consisted of only two strays I catnapped from my old apartment.

I never brought the tom home but I named it Franco after the musician.

Later, a new gray cat began showing up every time I fed Franco. I started feeding it and did so in months. One day, when Franco was out on one of his adventures, I dropped the pellets in front of the gray cat but it didn't even smell them. The following

day, Franco was back but the gray cat was gone. I will never see it again.

Weeks after this, a different calico started living inside boxes left outside one of the stores. She approached Franco and me during meal times and Franco didn't mind, so I too fed her. Soon, her belly got bigger, and later gave birth to four orange and white kittens inside the box where she lived in. Still weak, I gave her food and brought some water.

When I returned the following day, the calico was outside the box feeling weaker than ever.

No life was left inside the box.

The paths are strangers every time.

Hifi Brew
Barra Main Road
Opol, Misamis Oriental

23 August 2023

Dear V,

I took a tricycle today as opposed to walking. I wasn't in the mood to tire my legs out. I hope you don't mind me breaking the rules a bit, I just needed a bit of fresh air.

I realized in my writings that I stopped referring to my body as mine. I would rather distance myself from it— the body— as if that would mitigate the intimacy that I feel of being ensconced in my own skin.

When I take my walks, I try to focus on what the body can do for me, not for others. When I take my walks, I forget about performance. I forget about fawning. I am just a simple human being exercising her agency to occupy the streets.

It's not much of an occupation but rather a tiptoe, I would say. I still try to avert my eyes while walking. I'd stare at something far or linger too much on my steps.

It's tiresome to walk the streets as a woman. One could easily mistake politeness for malice. The body doesn't stop itself from associating with me. It cannot exist as a body on a vacuum. For others, it is irrevocably mine.

Yesterday I bawled my eyes out to my psychiatrist over the things that was done to the body to re-circuit its wirings. I considered electroconvulsive therapy. He says we haven't done everything yet. He tells me about his patient who was on the peak dosage of her medications who ended up bawling on the floor of his office, cocooned like a fetus.

"You are already crazy but you keep yourself in check," said my friend. I wonder how much more I would need to take to end up like the woman who bawled her eyes out on the floor. It even took me a massive a lot of willpower to get out of the house. My present state stifles me.

Everything is stifling, as if being subjected to a corset for eternity with your movements restricted. One can only move accordingly to what the corset allows. That's how it feels like sometimes to be trapped in this body. I cannot exercise my agency—its fears just take over me.

"Your fear is a defense mechanism for your past traumas," said my psychiatrist. But it is tiring to always be on high alert—to have your body in full arousal—even when the threats have long been gone. It's an untrustworthy organism that signals and blares the emergency ring even amidst a peaceful evening. It's tiring. I have no more words for it but this.

The weather is still gloomy until today. I foresee rain crashing down in a few minutes. I'll have to walk in the rain to get home. At least I've had my cup of coffee before going for another penitence. At the first drop of rain, I am leaving this place.

Data–Sierra Madre Ext.–Sierra Madre–Onyx–Ruby–Velasco–
Aglibut–Cuzner–Freedom Park–Juliano–Roxas–Pancho–Freedom
Park–Cuzner–CAS–CEM–Velasco–Ruby–Data

23 August 2023

Dear J,

Feeling drowsy on this particular walk. A cold spell has struck LB and with it all sorts of possibilities of disease.

The common cold finally got a hold of me—perhaps because of a lack of sleep two nights in a row.

Been under medication for two days now and feeling drowsy as hell. Perhaps, this is good in some sense. Because I always struggle to sleep.

I've always envied people who sleep fast and stay asleep longer.

Not even a two-month spell of chronic insomnia back in 2011—unbeknownst to me already a symptom of a major depressive episode—could convince me to get better at it. I'm pretty sure a big reason for my suicidal ideations during that difficult time was caused by that interminable insomnia.

During those two months, I couldn't get more than two hours of sleep each day. I tried all sorts of cures: First, I drank milk. Then, I sang the songs we sang at the Kingdom Hall. When none of those worked, I blew my disguise and confessed to an elder at the congregation that I was watching porn and was an onanist. He asked how many people were in the videos. I lied and said, just two. He said my problem was common and that he, too, struggled with this when he was young.

Writing this now overwhelms me. Sorry. I have to stop.

Data–Ruby–Velasco–Ela–Pili Drive–Ela–Lopez–Santos–Ruby–
Onyx–Data

24 August 2023

Dear J,

Here, at Data, thinking specifically about you and how you write, I can't help but be reminded of the poet Bernadette Mayer when she said, "Poetry makes sure language has no masters."

As I make a turn here at Ruby, I'm specifically mulling over intelligibility. I often hear that poetry is the most unprofitable of all the arts and those who do make some money out of it write intelligible poetry. Those who write the kind of poetry you write—or integrate into your essays—don't sell. This is not to say that your poetry is unintelligible: it simply demands more from me than most other poetry I read.

Entering Velasco, I remember that there was once a time when I actually thought ambiguity was a problem of poetry. I was convinced that ambiguity detached poetry from the people who needed it the most: the inarticulate. I reasoned that by making it difficult, we are narrowing poetry's circle of influence. I understand now that poetry is the most aloof animal ever created. Untamable, it owes nothing to any of us.

At Ela, I ask whether an aspiration for intelligibility is motivated by something deeper. Like most things, we are moved by individual temperaments and tendencies—some unfortunately inherited from childhood. Truth be told, although I want to write more beautifully, intelligibility seems to be where my well-spring is.

Thinking about this now here at Pili Drive makes me realize that this desire to understand often led me to occasions of clarity, which, in turn, generated everything that I've learned to attach to poetry—primarily, awe.

Of course, I could imagine a different poet who begins with ambiguity and ends with the emotions and states that we poets and lyric essayists aspire for. This, at least, is what came to me as I made my turn back to Ela.

I suppose intelligibility and ambiguity don't always have to be contradictory. Perhaps, they're distinct gates toward the same garden. And yes, I say gates because I just left the campus and am now walking the crowded Lopez sidewalk.

Iponan Main Road
Opol
Misamis Oriental

26 August 2023

Dear V,

I'm confronted with a lot of options for change. Even though I haven't left, I terribly sought for return. Things get so much easier when you see the landmark of where things start to get familiar again. I am walking at a leisurely pace. I don't intend to hurry. I am trying to savor this moment but my body lives elsewhere.

...

Sometimes familiarity carries no reprieve, it's just sickening. Nonetheless I walk the same old path in search of answers to questions lingering my mind. Am I an apparition? Without this body, who am I? Without this body I cannot take these walks nor can I roam. There will be no room for movement then, just haunting. But what could be said of a ghost that is in itself haunted?

A ghost haunts, that's how the usual story goes. But disembodied, we are reprised as none.

I've been reading this one psychiatric book and I realized that my conditions mirror that of an animal who has experienced inescapable shock. The curse goes this way: upon inescapable shock, your body assumes a mind of its own. So, what we have here now is not a body but a semblance of a body. I have no control over things. I am a passive observer trapped in a flesh suit. My emergency alarms strike at random. I may be at ease but my heart palpitates 150 beats per minute.

I am reminded of Anne Boyer's own model of the inescapable shock. According to her, I probably would have been more grateful if I haven't been dragged off a non-shocking place. I probably would've formed an attachment to the one who dragged me, the dragging, and the electrified grid. Because if I remained where I was, I will forever be in my element: I will forever feel alive.

7/11 Convenience Store
Georgetown Square
Cagayan de Oro City

27 August 2023

Dear V,

Today, something dull feels exciting. I brought a book with me to read at a local convenience store while I wait for my parents to finish church. I stopped going to masses since I was 16. As protest, I kept the manna in my bag and waited for it to fill up a whole bottle of spearmint. Of course, my mother found out. Good thing it was the pandemic so they couldn't reach me by hand. They ended up eating the manna during their virtual masses in the midst of the pandemic. I wonder if the rotting bread gave them a stomach ache, if they stomachached through it despite the mold.

"Magabaan ka sa imong gibuhay," my mother warned me. Maybe this was the curse of the manna. I couldn't connect to my body outside of being at war. War is where I feel alive. Everything else transpiring is just time idly passing by.

What I noticed about my walks is that it makes me aware of how I inhabit my body. The proximity, the disembodiment, the disconnect. I am trying to mend a wound I cannot reach. Through these walks, I am integrating this disconnect through my psyche. I am able to flesh out the crux of the wound itself.

Much has been left unsaid. There's no need for me to tell you the traumas I've been through. I don't need to tell you all my secrets. What matters is everything else. What matters are these lapses and the attempts to compensate for these lapses.

Lopez–Cuzner–Mondonedo–Roxas–Viado–Pancho–Juliano–
Lantican–Velasco–Ruby–Onyx–Data

29 August 2023

Dear J,

I stopped at the intersection of Cuzner and Capinpin just after Carabao Park to write these words on my phone.

As you know, it's the start of a new school year here. Roads are jam-packed once more. Yesterday, I saw parents—lots of them—of what I can only imagine are thousands of freshmen coming in. It's that time of the year when I wish I wasn't living in LB.

Along C Park, a poster welcomed the initiates: Para sa Bayan.

As children, especially when we grew up with younger siblings, we were raised by our parents to always think of others first (i.e., our brothers and sisters) or at least to always care about what they would say (i.e., our relatives). I could imagine this might even be truer for you than it was for me.

Growing up, our parents took away our Saturdays and Sundays—days I would have spent just playing Pokemon on my Gameboy—to attend services at church or go from house to house and try to convince people to listen to us read the Bible. When I began taking church life seriously, almost around puberty, this self-sacrificing spirit was further reinforced. I would later cut a portion of my allowance to give to my Deaf Bible student so he could attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall.

When Jesus died for humanity nothing more can be said about this matter.

And so when I entered UP, the spirit of those words—"Para sa Bayan"—was nothing new. The cliché only took on a different subject: the nation, the bayan, that ever-powerful social construct.

I wouldn't get involved in student politics until I left the church in the summer of 2012, got back to school after a year of absence, and decided that life was still worth living. I spent my last year and a half at UP Baguio advocating for better mental health services at school, campaigning for the then RH Bill, and calling for more students' rights. But most of the time, I was just really involved in a lot of superfluous internal drama among my political org mates. Fortunately, I was sane enough to stay away from frequent tirades against opposing organizations, something my org mates seemed to enjoy very much.

In short, I exited the first 20 years of my life—17 years of that at school—out into the real world with a very poor sense of self. And I had to fight my way out of all these institutions just to realize that there was something in me I could take ownership of.

That is to say, I had to fight my way out of all these institutions to be someone who would even care enough to write these words to you today.

Data–Ruby–Bulusan–Pearl–Banahaw–Diamond–Santos–Lopez–C
Park–Cuzner–Mondonedo–Espino–Juliano–Cuzner–Aglibut–
Capinpin–CEM–Velasco–Ruby–Onyx–Data

2 September 2023

Dear J,

Let me tell you a secret. I'm beginning to see cracks in my friendship with this place. And this could only mean one thing: my friendship with it is getting old.

*Visible, invisible,
A fluctuating charm,*

January 6, 2021. The night before I arrived at LB I reached Calamba around dusk after around five hours of travel. About two long hours of that trip were spent with my eyes wide open going back and forth between the driver's steering wheel and the road ahead while he typed on his phone. Why I trusted the idiot with my life I do not know. If I have to guess, a year of being stuck at home desensitizes us. We forgive the driver's little gamble with death because what is it compared to everything we've been through the year before?

Since the earliest jeep to LB would not arrive until after three hours, I tried to get whatever sleep I could get at my girlfriend's house.

*An amber-colored amethyst
Inhabits it; your arm*

In the morning, we rode the jeep, dropped off at Demarces, and walked toward Rosemary Street. A friend was staying on a compound owned by a retired UP employee named Edna. People, even those who seemed as old as she was, called her Tita Ed.

Tita Ed owned almost everything you would see on Rosemary Street. She bought most of the real estate there, built several apartment complexes, and opened most of them for lease except her three-floored house.

I told her I'd be renting one of her rooms for a few days while I looked for a more permanent place to stay in. She said she hoped I wouldn't look further and just stay with her.

*Approaches, and
It opens and
It closes;*

We would often see Tita Ed doing her rounds in the morning on her unassuming duster. Truth be told, she is poor. After only three days of talking to her, I learned that all her money goes to her youngest son, who was about my age and almost died of cancer a few years ago. A few months after my very first conversation with Tita Ed, that beloved son died of Covid.

*You have meant
To catch it,
And it shrivels;*

Those were days of strict lockdowns. I had to fake I was from inside the campus to get past the guards. The trick was to wear nothing that would arouse suspicion (i.e., slippers, shorts, and shirts you would wear at home).

I would love to show you what the campus looked like at that time. You must have a better recollection of what it was before 2020 and, therefore, would make better comparisons. Perhaps you would say sidewalks that once quivered by the number of feet walking on them were all silent and still and that dorm windows that once sheened were invisible in the night.

*You abandon
Your intent—*

He was ready to give me what he said was the lowest rate in his entire career in business: a mere 3k for a room. He showed me where the room was. It was on a three-floor building with not a single person currently occupying. I'll let you hook into my internet, he said. Just add 1k.

Financially, it was a good deal. But c'mon. In a three-floor building by myself?

I left Pangasinan because of loneliness. I didn't come here for more of it.

Seeing that Tita Ed's deal was almost similar but that I would be surrounded by other occupants, I decided to stay with her for two months before finally finding the apartment I'd been living in for almost three years now.

*It opens, and it
Closes and you
Reach for it—*

The first week became the first month. I met friends I first made online. I got invited to events and tried the many restaurants around. I started walking and walking and walking, befriending LB.

Next year would mark my third year here. I'm almost like a junior, which interestingly reminds me of being old.

The walks have been repetitive as well as the sights. Even if I pride myself on being constantly appreciative of the ordinary and the familiar, I cannot escape this tendency to get used to a place.

While writing this I had to stop because a woman asked for directions on how to get out of the campus, something which I easily gave away.

This is another sign that this place has grown old in me.
Therefore, the need to look for new reasons to stay.

*The blue
Surrounding it
Grows cloudy, and
It floats away
From you.*

Plaza
Barra, Opol
Misamis Oriental

7 September 2023

Dear V,

I've been having a tough time these past few days. My body found a way to take over me. It has rendered me a prisoner in its cell. I was lethargic, out of focus, afraid, anxious, bed-ridden. I barely got anything done these past few days.

It's only recently when I was able to reckon with myself that I have a disabled body. I've been on pills since I was 16. I'm 25 now, so you can only imagine the amount of pain I've endured with the number of pills I've ingested.

I came out of the house to write. The house was filled with busy bodies trying to mend the cracks and damages around. It was stifling to be surrounded all around by men, I have no safe space there aside from my also stifling humid room. I needed to take a walk to clear my head.

I wonder how things would be different if there were women instead of men at our house. That would definitely enliven me, I would even strike conversations with them. With men I just feel unsafe. You fear where their eyes might dart. It's frustrating. With women, it feels like being surrounded by nurturing gazes.

How are you? What are you discovering with your walks? In my walks I've come to acknowledge my breaking points— the body as ghost, the body as vessel, the body as disabled. I find my situation akin to the mechanisms of an epidemiological triad in infectious diseases. The body is the host, my illnesses are the pathogens, and the cruel systems in place in this world is the

environment. How could one thrive in an environment where it encourages my own body's decay?

I have some good news though. This squalid park has been turned into a children's playground, courtesy of the erected swings, see-saws, and monkey climbers. It's lively here. I'm sitting on a cracking bench. It's not that bad. At least I'm surrounded by people, albeit children too young to be screaming all these Bisaya curses.

Data–Ruby–Bulusan–Pearl–Banahaw–Diamond–Santos–Ruby–
Velasco–Aglibut–Sandoval–Lantican–Juliano–Pancho–Viado–
Roxas–Mondonedo–Cuzner–C Park–Lopez–Santos–Diamond–
Banahaw–Pearl–Bulusan–Ruby–Data

13 September 2023

Dear J,

Trying to write while waiting for my order at Janges. It is a bad time to eat out. Lots of students walk on the side of the road sharing space with reckless drivers. A car that is trying to park at Seoul Kitchen stops a woman cycling uphill. She had to push her weight up after the car managed to park as all her momentum was gone. Too many cars, too little space. Most of these people are locals living just a few minutes of walk away from everything else. But they seem to ride their cars out of necessity. I dated a driver who once told me she needed to ride her car because it would fall apart if she didn't. What a perfect allegory of modern life.

I've been waiting for my burger for about 10 minutes already. Why does a burger take longer to prepare than silog?

Another car parks near Seoul Kitchen. This time no parking space is available. The car, an elegant black, parks at the side of the already narrow road, its left side protruding. The woman who went out of the car communicates to her husband the driver via phone even when they're just two meters apart. She may have informed him to fix his parking. He moves and again stops a couple walking and then a tricycle. Now another car gets out of a parking space while another enters Pearl Street. Both white cars stop momentarily. The drivers chat. They seem to know each other. The guard directs the black car on how to fill in the now vacant parking space. In less than five minutes, the road is clear once more for walkers. Students continue walking and my burger has arrived.

Pyrex Street
Barra, Opol
Misamis Oriental
October 16, 2023

Dear V,

I was supposed to go walking today but a fire broke out on my usual route, near the River Dike. This is appalling news, but I wonder why my first instinct was to take a video of the ravishing fire. How detached am I from the horror of such tragedies, seeing beauty from the thick fog of smoke emanating from the burning houses? Some would call this "sublime". Slavoj Zizek would call this an "event", a purview that dislodges you from your daily bearings, bringing you close to the real.

I realized that what I encountered today was holy. Things rarely happen around here. But with the raging fire, every person on the street was at a standstill, agape, holding their cameras to later ponder to themselves that what indeed happened was real. Time has been disrupted. The firefighters took 20 minutes to tame the fire. Until then, time has stood at a standstill.

For a short moment, I've forgotten I have a body. For a short moment, I've become a limb of a collective conscious staring agape at a holy fire.



Afterword

The Blind Collaborative Process of Writing-Walking

JESA: I was and still am grateful to have crossed paths with you, a fellow walker, in the 20th ANWW last June 2023, which, if you think about it, has probably led us to go through with this experimental and collaborative project on walking. I am grateful that you accepted my proposal to do this project with me and I couldn't be more ecstatic about fleshing out the rife possible points of entry in interpreting this project with regards to the walking methodology.

For context to our readers, sometime this August 2023, I pitched to you to do a collaborative experimental project similar to Gabrielle Bates and Jennifer S. Cheng's work *So We Must Meet Apart* where they wrote each other letters within an allotted duration of time, only to have them read each other's works at the end of the experiment. I thought that it would be interesting to do the same project with a specific emphasis on walking. As I've suggested, we imitated Bates and Cheng's process.

In the initial stages, we began the project by focusing on each of our walking (vis-à-vis writing) processes rather than whatever the outcome was going to be. We weren't exactly concerned with what the outcome was going to become *yet*. Surprisingly, at the end of our project, when we were reading our letters to each other, we were left with more impactful questions than insightful answers as to our walking processes.

As you stated in our previous correspondence, Bates and Cheng's work has banked on the similarities between their correspondences. Yet we cannot help but notice that our first readers have emphasized *the differences* between our letters, specifically through the lens of gender. One of the first readers of this work, L, for instance, remarked that walking, which was generally perceived as a "basic locomotive movement that could

simply be as such from an ungendered perspective," could be perceived as an illusion where the "basic and typical act of walking" could actually be "colored and refracted as opposed to the procedural transparency that patriarchal 'normality' accords upon it" while he compared my letters to yours.

Personally, I foresaw that our different genders is going to become a glaring sign that would perhaps invite our readers to read our correspondences through a gendered lens simply because we are walker-writers of the opposite sex, case closed. While L's comments were very insightful, I want us to go further than that in processing our resulting work in the spirit of collaboration and experimentation, especially with regards to how our experiment could contribute to the existing literature on the walking methodology. As we've both agreed, we do not want this work to be reduced to a critique on walking through the lens of gender nor do we want its interpretations to be reduced to our gendered differences.

Albeit the case, I believe we simply cannot dismiss L's comments on our work. So I suggest we could bank on his comments to begin our discussion. How did you feel about L's comments as a cisheterosexual male walker-writer with activist-leaning ideologies? What discomforts or dissonances were aroused and what responses came to your mind? Reading your essay "Traversing Liminality Through Walking", I believe that there is so much more to your walking process than meets the eye, something transcendental perhaps. Maybe you could also tell us more about your experiences with your walking and writing process and practice.

VINCE: After reading L's feedback, the biggest thing I had to think about is whether my letters and my process of writing them

reinforced this patriarchal gaze that you intentionally or unintentionally challenged in your letters and which, quite frankly, has dominated and may still be dominating the walking literature today.

Although there are many excellent examples of women writing about their walks, they've been mostly excluded from the canon. And this is actually a major reason why I agreed to this project. When I asked Vincenz Serrano who else he was talking to about walking, he said no one. In the syllabus of his walking class, you'll find about three names of Filipinos who seem to have used the method; two of them are women: Conchitina Cruz ("Pedestrian Studies") and Joy Dayrit ("The Walk"). So your voice and gaze, Jesa, is badly needed. Our project significantly fills this gap, and it was my privilege to witness firsthand how you executed walking as a method in your unique way.

Given these complexities intricately intertwined with our project from the very beginning, an obvious challenge for me is how to position my letters alongside yours in a way that doesn't reduce them and our entire project into an exhibit of gendered and ungendered walking (to use L's words). As you said, we can't control how our readers will interpret our works, and I have a personal commitment never to think that I owe anyone an explanation for my works. They're my truth at specific moments of my existence but not my absolute truth. They don't define me. I have the freedom to change as I have the freedom to be someone I'm not yet. So, it was a wise suggestion from you to use the afterword to guide readers on how to re-read the letters and frame this afterword as a dialogue to encourage seeing them as complementary. The very existence of this afterword somehow addresses the gender question.

A practice that I think is so important for all male writers is reviewing our words—checking to ensure that they don't reinforce the patriarchal structures we've all been working so hard to dismantle. And that's what's great about walking. Walking as a writing method, at least as I've experienced it, is naturally reflective. Its physicality serves as a constraint that leaves one with no choice but to look again. It is very rare for me to write a cohesive paragraph while in the middle of a walk. Often, I write a few lines of observation. When I'm lucky, I get insights. But a fundamental principle I follow with my walks, which I picked up early on, is not to force anything—to use these walks as a practice of listening for what's in the landscape and what comes to me while walking. This is as opposed to coming to the walks with an agenda, a strict lens through which everything you see is filtered. While walking as listening is, I think, a principle more aligned to any deconstructive project, it also allows biases to emerge. Your unconscious brings them out, and you'll hear them occasionally when you listen closely. But that's the thing about walking: since you can't write cohesively while your feet move, you are compelled to return to what you wrote outdoors. Returning, reviewing, and rewriting your thoughts gives you one way to check your language and biases, especially if you're a male writer. While reviewing my notes and writing them into a letter, I asked myself, "Did I see that right?" Without reviewing, reliving, and rewriting the walk, one will bring all those unchecked biases into one's writing.

But readers won't know this. They won't see the process that went through writing these letters. They won't say that these letters they read started as snippets written without structure on my phone while my feet move. They wouldn't know they went through a review process a day or two after because that's just how the walking methodology works. And so this afterword is wonderful

because the richness of walking is perceived in its process and not in its product.

Another thing to mention is that one's location on the landscape is not just a physical point. It's an intersection where norms, history, gender, and other social categories converge. In short, the walking method is inescapably intersectional. When I'm standing at the intersection of Espino Street and Mondonedo Street inside UPLB, I see artifacts of colonialism (Baker Hall and the half of Freedom Park surrounding the fertility tree). This was once the Japanese internment camp. And yet today, the same spaces are used for events, and people go here for recreation. So, these spaces are socio-historical. Even when walking alone, I'm never truly by myself. I'm surrounded by reminders of the past, which now bring reconstructed meanings and new narratives we've attached to them. When I walk in these spaces, I cut through their meanings with my own multiple layers of meaning: my gender, my multiple disabilities, my spiritual and religious background, my regional identity, etc. So, a writer who chooses a walking method can never escape these layers and intersections. Even if they don't write explicitly about these subjects, since they walk on multi-layered grounds, they must consider them at least while executing their project. But this also means that since walking is rigorously intersectional, a work borne through it will most likely be complex, which warrants a multi-layered reading. Our letters can never be about one thing.

When re-reading these letters, knowing the writer's goal is essential. My goal early on was simple: to let specific objects or points in the landscape trigger memories I had in those same points. I was reading Henry Bugbee then, so his views on memory were driving most of my letters. But I was also thinking about Rebecca Solnit's interpretation of walking as a mnemonic device, particularly with the songlines of Australian Aborigines. Was your

choice of subject matter in your walks, many of which touched on gender and the body, intentional? Or did you let the walks define your subject as you went?

JESA: Before I answer your questions, let me refer back to a few points that you've mentioned. I'd also like to flesh out some things before proceeding.

First, to address your concern: I do not think that you're reinforcing the patriarchal gaze while you take your walks. You may be a *participant* in it as you take your walks, but that's just how the world goes; it just so happens that the current system is convenient for you. As a female walker, what I would characterize to be an intrusive 'patriarchal gaze' are those disruptive moments (cat calling, unwanted touch, prolonged staring, among others) that brings me back to my body– the body as *female*, the *corporeal difference* between my body and those who mostly occupy the streets– when I take my walks.

Going back to the discussion: albeit a less experienced walker than you are, I agree with you on some points. It is important to review one's words when a walker-writer is in the editing process. Albeit the case, one cannot get rid of one's privilege as a man while walking the streets like garments you can just disrobe after a long walk (i.e. checking for biases in one's writing). I think that the mere fact that you were able to walk all the streets you've indicated safely and unscathed is a statement in itself of you exercising your privilege as a man walking in a predominantly patriarchal landscape. While reviewing and editing for one's biases is important, I am interested in how else you have been challenging your relationship to this so-called 'patriarchal normality' that walking affords you. (This, in turn, makes me reflect if my lack of 'experience' with walking, which is to say, the lack of variety that

my paths have covered, is a constraint that is inevitable in my walks as a woman 'making her way' in a 'man's world'.)

I say this with no contempt but with utmost curiosity because in my experience, I am limited to traverse paths which are familiar to me while walking, that is to say, the routes that I deem safe to walk on. This gravely affects the state of my writing, I believe. Since I am only passing by a few routes in my walks, I can walk at a much more leisurely stride, giving me the opportunity to become more introspective and focused on my writing. I also find it glaringly important that my walks always have a preconceived beginning, middle, and end. I already know what to expect to see in my walks—my focus goes to the meditative nature that the locomotive movement affords me while I take my walks.

In our past correspondences, we've talked about seeing life in the form of the wilderness: there are clearly-defined paths and there are uncharted landscapes. If we were to compare this to the wilderness, I, as a woman, am only assured of my safety if I walk on clear paths frequently traveled by other people. Although sometimes, even *this* is not enough. This is by no means special only to me. I've frequented forums where women seek advice about their safety when, for instance, traveling solo to different places. There's a niche subreddit, [r/femaletravels](#), where women seek advice from each other when traveling solo. The most upvoted advices I've gleaned from the subreddit is, as predicted, always emphasized one's safety— not giving out contact information to strangers, not going to a place without a definite plan, not going to anywhere private with other people, and saving the local hotline for tourists in case of emergencies. The lack of a niche subreddit specifically for men traveling solo in itself makes one curious.

On the other hand, I agree with you that the walking method is 'inescapably intersectional'. The path I most frequent, for instance, is the Iponan River Dike. Before the river dike was erected, it used to be a row of houses occupied by squatters in our area. Upon the Typhoon Sendong struck Northern Mindanao in 2011, the houses were demolished, reduced to ruins, and were salvaged into a one-kilometer river dike upon the declaration that our subdivision was a 'flood-prone area'. Thousands have died in the flood, including some of my friends. They serve as ghostly reminders of the past whenever I traverse the Iponan River Dike to this day. Currently, the surviving squatters have relocated their houses to the edges of the river dike. Decades of illegal mining and deforestation in the higher areas in our region had this effect on the current topology of our subdivision.

Women's safety and fear has a geography, aside from it being also informed by matrices of oppression itself. Which brings me to my third agreement with you: even the product of these walks warrant a multi-layered reading, aside from its seemingly reducible take on gender.

Now, to answer your questions: my writing was more on the latter when I embarked on my walks. I didn't intend to write about bodies nor gender; it just surfaced as I became aware of the spaces that I've inhabited. There is one distinction between us though when it comes to the *when* of writing our correspondences. Aside from my first letter, I've mostly written my letters *after* I've taken the walks. There were even letters that I've written only while *pondering* about taking a walk. Writing for me was a way to process how my walks have turned out to be— what feelings were aroused, what thoughts came to mind, etc. In other cases, writing for me while pondering about taking a walk were reflections as to why I've decided not to take a walk in the first place— be it of safety, fear, or simply out of lethargy. Be it the case, I do not want to definitively state that fear

and safety are the driving motivators of my correspondences while walking. I believe that the walks I've taken were politically-loaded actions in itself. It is somewhat empowering to be able to walk, pause, take a photograph, and write while I took my walks. It made me feel that these once alien spaces could be integrated with me, after all.

VINCE: Patriarchal normativity emanates in a lot of the oldest writings on walking. I'll always reference Solnit since she's the authority on the history of walking. She said that the canon of walkers had a tendency to preach and moralize how walking should be done. And since they're mostly wealthy, educated white men, they would preach things that reflect their status—things like walking should be done in rural areas, walking should be done alone, it should be done in nature, because it has to encourage deep thought and a sense of freedom. There are a lot of "shoulds." I started experimenting with walking long before I encountered Solnit and started reading the literature just around two years ago, so I have been guilty of this tendency to moralize. I could look back at my archive and would probably see many occasions in the past when I preached about how walking should be done in a particular way. Being aware of this tendency now, I try to avoid prescribing how walks should be done. If I write about how walking is done, I present it in a way specific to my experience and not something everyone should espouse. I think it's critical to remember that we write about our walking experiences not to champion one way of walking but to make a strong statement that "Hey, almost everyone else walks, and everyone walks differently."

Another thing I'm trying to avoid when I write about my walking is to assume that I "understand" or "know" a particular place. When I walk, especially when I cross different large areas here in Los Baños

repeatedly, I begin to notice patterns like certain areas would be filled with a particular group of people at certain times. Seeing these patterns can be very fulfilling because it could convince one, if one isn't careful, that one "knows" and "understands" the place. But noticing patterns is not equivalent to really understanding a place, a feat that requires more than just walking in the same place many times. This assumption that one knows is reminiscent of colonial mentality. In their eagerness to subdue places, colonizers assumed many wrong things about the places they colonized. Colonialism, of course, persists in a heavily patriarchal context. When I walk on new territory for the first time, I do my best to remember that I'm an outsider, that I know nothing about these places, and that I ought to be as cautious and less disruptive as possible to the people who live there.

Thank you for sharing your insights on safety. This is an issue that definitely warrants a closer look. You're right. Most of the time, when I walk, I feel safe. This is why I'm confident about doing walks at night, long walks, and week-long walks. There are areas in Los Baños that are, of course, dangerous to walk in, no matter who you are, so I still veer away from those areas. There is also the issue of roads, many of which are designed for vehicles and not people. Most roads in the Philippines will not have sidewalks. There is this long stretch of road in Los Baños called the IPB road, which I always wanted to walk but just couldn't. It's always busy, and there are no sidewalks except for that stretch in front of IRRI. I tried walking it once, but it was too dangerous, and I had to turn back. I saw a family sitting on the sidewalk with cars speeding behind them. I was concerned for their safety, mainly because they had a child with them, but they didn't seem concerned at all. I wouldn't recommend anyone to walk on that road. Interestingly, this same road was where a female UP student was taken, sexually assaulted, and killed years ago when this road wasn't cemented yet and not

as busy as it is today. Busy or not, some streets just aren't safe for women. On the last leg of my long walk from Los Baños to San Pablo, a man riding a motorcycle approached me and offered me a ride. He said "kanina ka pa naglalalakad." I think I shared this at ANWW20. Although I interpreted this as an act of kindness, I was also surprised that he was watching me from afar. Things could be entirely different if it were you who was walking and that man approached you for a ride. I mean, he could've been following you throughout your walk. So yeah, safety issues could affect all walkers, but most especially women.

It is also crucial for you to share that these constraints have affected how you write about your walks and, perhaps more importantly, "see" your experimentation with walking as a method. I don't have clear answers for this. It would be nice to wake up tomorrow to a world where women could feel safer to explore other forms of walking and not be limited by fear. But since this is our current situation and we can't change it anytime soon, I wonder how we can work around these constraints. This reminds me of Annie Dillard. I read this article a couple of years ago about how she wrote *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. It is a book where she employed walking as a methodology. Some who read her book thought she was describing the wild, a far-flung place inaccessible to most of us, the subject of most male nature writers. She executed her prose so well that you won't realize unless you do your research that she was writing about a humble creek just near her house, which she discovered in a walk around her neighborhood. Something like your Iponan River. And she worked on the book while living in the suburbs with her then-husband, not in a cabin alone in the woods. In one of her journal entries, she wrote that she doubted whether anyone would take a book written by a "Virginia housewife named Annie" seriously. She won the Pulitzer, so perhaps none of that really mattered. Or perhaps it was

all that mattered. Her lens was so radical and refreshing that she penetrated the canon.

I know I have a male body, and I'm aware of all the privileges that come with it, but I, too, feel constrained sometimes, although not by my body but by other factors, such as money. I mentioned in ANWW20 that I'm interested in exploring something I call "shallow walking," which involves walking longer stretches of landscapes crossing different areas. I call it shallow as opposed to the deep walking that happens when you repeatedly rewalk a place, such as what you do in your neighborhood and what I do here at Los Baños. It is my dream to one day take a shallow walk of Pangasinan to befriend my roots and get a glimpse of patterns in a province with a language slowly fading away. It's an itch I just set for myself. But walks like this incur a lot of time and expenses. My two-day walk from Los Baños to San Pablo cost me around Php 1,500 for food and lodging. Imagine doing a week-long or three-week walk. It's easy to see how expensive these projects can be. There are books written by writers (mostly male again) sponsored by rich entities to walk uninhabited places across the world and write about them. I tried reading one of these books and immediately felt a dissonance, knowing how much these walks can cost and how impossible it is for someone like me to mimic a walk like that. I would rather read a walking account of someone outside this category, someone with an alternative, unsung take on the walking body, something closer to mine. The walking accounts of individuals outside the white, wealthy male category are powerful because that old canonical category is a very narrow and incomplete, if not inaccurate, depiction of the walking body. Only good can come from writing about our experience of the walking body, no matter how seemingly constrained it is, because only through it can we honestly say that walking is universal even as it is categorical and individual. And this is why Dillard remains to be

one of my greatest inspirations. She gave us permission to see our constraints as possibilities. It's an incomplete answer. It won't address all the issues you raised. But I think it's an important point to mention.

Your letter about walking inside your house is a testament to how constraints can bring forth something so beautiful and radical. Could you share more about your process of writing that particular letter? Anything that surprised you about the process?

JESA: Thank you, Vince, for providing us with this very extensive context about the pre-existing literature on the writing methodology. I have been a fan of Rebecca Solnit for the longest time, and I took immense pleasure in you citing her work on walking (albeit I haven't read it yet). It's nice to have the walking methodology's history be partially read through feminine lens in this conversation. It was also enlightening to know about the difference between deep walks and shallow walks, which, now, has given me a framework to interpret the long and repetitive walks I've taken along the Iponan River.

I would like to read what Annie Dillard has written about walking. I am especially curious as to what constraints she was able to overcome and if it mirrors that of the constraints I face when walking. You've mentioned that she mostly did (deep) walks by a creek near her house, which eerily resembles methods I'm accustomed to and felt safe to do. It makes me wonder about other women walkers and the tiny (and perhaps, seemingly safe) corners of their deep walks— if they're predisposed to do their walks that way— and how we tread these familiar paths repetitively in an attempt to glean something new out of it. Sometimes, as I've mentioned to you before, we arrive as strangers in familiar places.

I do tread with caution about what you said about how walking is 'universal', for the term masks the inequalities of power distributions implicated in what seems to be the status quo, predisposing a specific ideology such as patriarchy as 'the normal' even with something as seemingly trivial as walking. Albeit the case, I'm glad that we're talking about these gender disparities already, and we're shedding light into the textured nuances of it.

I also agree on what you said about 'constraints being possibilities'. Personally for me, I think these constraints would be more characteristic of that of a prison cell. Questions come to mind such as, who holds the key and could the key be possibly in this cell itself? Am I participating in holding myself back in taking more extensive walks as I see the world bared in its most gruesome nature? Am I, in part, constraining myself, confining my actions in a box? After all, I do not agree that we are simply victims of our circumstances. I still believe in our agencies to be subjects for change. One only needs to dare and be brave in this patriarchal landscape, if not to overthrow these governing structures themselves.

I am yet to become that woman and we are yet to become that kind of society. I believe that somewhere in the world, a lot of brave women are already doing the work that I currently fear to do, and I would especially like to read their works and converse with these women whose narratives are yet to come to light.

Also, thank you for asking about my process when I did my walks within my house. It was especially unique and unbelievably more mentally-laborious than my other walks, simply because it was a way of traversing a physical space that I already deem familiar and safe for me. When one is situated in a space in the safest way possible as that of one's house (if one even finds safety in their home), the challenge for me becomes: how do I break free from the constraints of this safety? How can I challenge myself to write

about something with higher stakes in a premise where I already deem myself safe?

In that specific letter, I said "I take walks to escape the melancholy in the house." Within the confines of my sala, there's very little wiggle room to walk, so I ended up walking in circles. As you may find in my letter, it was a bit obvious that I was having the thoughts of someone who was pacing back and forth as opposed to actually doing a tedious walk. My thoughts were circular, and instead of the walk giving me reprieve from the melancholy of the house, I was further ensconced in it instead, akin to trying to wriggle out of a quicksand—there's no point in resisting, the safest recourse is to stay still. I may be physically safe but my mind was in heightened arousal.

If we were to take into account our previous conversation about navigating the myriads of spaces that I inhabit (my body, my house, and my physical environment) it wouldn't be a far reach to say that I don't exactly feel safe even in the most visceral space I live in. Walking in circles around the living room, I realized, is a way of walking inside the body. It wasn't fully fleshed out in that specific letter, and I am excited to write more about this probably in a separate project.

Thanks to this project and to you, I was able to learn more about the walking methodology, something that I am admittedly still a neophyte at. I am glad that we were able to flesh out our project beyond the gendered lens with which we began and somehow found a middle ground for us and our works to interact despite the disparity between our walking processes, knowledge, and backgrounds. Any last thoughts before we end this conversation? Tell us more about your recent, ongoing, and future walking projects.

VINCE: Jesa, you brought to light some very thought-provoking questions, all of which would easily extend our humble project into uncharted terrains. I do hope we continue to think about these questions (I'm sure we would!) even after we close this project, and I hope whoever reads and finds this project interesting will also find these questions worthy of engagement.

You raised a critical note about the universality of walking, which is too vital to skip. So, I would briefly clarify what I meant. I think we both already agree that there is no one way to walk and that not everyone can walk. This is what I meant when I said that walking is categorical and individual. I understand that the word "universal" could be problematic, but I was simply echoing Solnit when she said that "the subject of walking is, in some sense, about how we invest universal acts with particular meanings. Like eating or breathing, it can be invested with wildly different cultural meanings, from the erotic to the spiritual, from the revolutionary to the artistic."

What I think Solnit is saying when she called walking "universal" is not that it should be done one way since that is the very argument her book dismantled or that everyone could do it. What I think she meant is that walking is too common a type of human action, too embedded in human culture and everyday experience, much like eating and breathing, that even those who don't walk or walk differently could, in her words, invest particular meanings into this human action, and perhaps, I'll add, even take ownership of it.

Like you, this project has been immensely helpful to me. I may not be able to fully articulate it right now, but I feel like I've grown as a walker and a writer just by writing those letters to you, reading your letters, and engaging in this dialogue. And because of that, I'll be forever grateful to you for initiating and inviting me to join you in this project. Among the few walking projects I've done, this is the

most challenging so far. I say this with complete honesty because, through it, I've finally started to experience walking not just as a solitary, reflective act where I only meet myself or a version of it on the road but also as a social act where I meet my neighbor (in this case, you), who has an entirely different experience and take on the act and the spaces where it happens. So, please accept my sincerest gratitude.

I intend to do more walks in 2024 to test what I learned from ANWW20, my readings, and this project. But I'm still unsure where most of these walks would take place and what they would be about. There's one walk that I'm pretty clear about, though. Early this year, hopefully before summer, I plan to rewalk some of the preaching routes I used to walk on at Baguio City as a JW minister from 2008 to 2011. Since many of those routes are familiar, I would employ a method similar to what I did here on our project: to use space as a trigger for memories. I'm actually quite afraid to do this particular walk because Baguio City is a pretty small place, and the routes I'll be walking on would pass by areas where people I used to know back at the church I left could still be living. There's also the grief aspect to it since I would be walking many of these routes for the first time in more than 13 years. I'm already a completely different person compared to when I used to walk them more than a decade ago. To use your language, I'm returning to them as a stranger. I don't know what to expect, and I'm not even entirely sure I'm already prepared to do this walk. But it has to be done.

The level of difficulty our project afforded me is an excellent preparation for this forthcoming walk. So, again, thank you.



Notes

The title is a homage to Gabrielle Bates and Jennifer S. Cheng's collaborative work of the same name.

The poem in pp. 27–30 was extracted from Marianne Moore's "A Jelly-Fish".

We thank Levi Masuli, the first reader of this work, for his comments on how to further develop this project.



Published by Bangkô
2023

Jesa Sukanob
@bonpourbruler
lnk.bio/jesasukanob

Vince Imbat
@vinceimbat
vinceimbat.com

Images
Vince Imbat

Layout
Jesa Sukanob

