

Modernist perambulations through time and space: From Enlightened walking to crawling, stalking, modelling and street-walking

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Abstract: Analysing diverse modes of walking across a wide range of texts from the Enlightenment period and beyond, this article explores how the practice of walking was discovered by philosophers, educators and writers as a rich discursive trope that stood for competing notions of the morally good life. The discussion proceeds to then investigate how psychological, philosophical and moral interpretations of bad practices of walking in particular resurface in texts by Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and the interwar writer Irmgard Keun. It is argued that literary modernism transformed walking from an Enlightenment trope signifying progress into the embodiment of moral and epistemological ambivalence. In this process, walking becomes an expression of the disconcerting experience of modernity. The paper concludes with a discussion of walking as a gendered performance: while the male walkers in the modernist texts under discussion suffer from a bad gait that leads to ruination, the new figure of the flâneuse manages to engage in pleasurable walking by abandoning the Enlightenment legacy of the good gait.

Keywords: modes of walking, discursive trope, Enlightenment discourse, modernism, modernity, moral and epistemological ambivalence, gender, flâneuse.

Walking on one's two legs is an essential but ordinary skill that, unlike cycling, skate-boarding, roller-skating or ballroom dancing, does not require special proficiency, aptitude or thought—unless, of course, we are physically impaired. And yet, unlike any other form of mobility, the human ability to walk, ramble, saunter or stroll has acquired huge cultural meaning in European literature and thought. It was in the 18th century that bipedal walking attracted the attention of anthropologists,

philosophers, scientists and writers who began to explore its cultural significance and rich metaphoric potential. Perhaps the most prominent figure in Western imagination is the Romantic poet who roams through a seemingly wild, untamed landscape in search of communion with nature. Besides well-known Romantic walkers such as Coleridge and William and Dorothy Wordsworth, there is the daring figure of the 19th-century natural scientist who explores nature on foot in the service of science: Horace-Bénédict de Saussure studied the geology of the Alps and managed to reach the summit of Mont Blanc in 1786. And the German Alexander von Humboldt climbed Chimborazo in Ecuador up to an altitude of 5800 metres in 1802. At that time the Andean mountain was deemed to be the highest in the world. In the 19th century the figure of the urban flâneur also appears on the scene. Edgar Allan Poe, Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne and, above all, Charles Baudelaire brought into view this leisurely type who explores the urban environment as the appropriate setting for his aimless strolling. In literary studies the debate on walking has been dominated by the flâneur precisely because he is seen as a representative of a modernity that is simultaneously seductive and deeply unsettling.¹ A walking reader of the city as spectacle, the flâneur cultivates a mode of attention that homes in on advertising hoardings, shop-window displays, electric lighting, traffic signs and—generally—fleeting surface phenomena which feature so prominently in modernist texts, ranging from Joyce, Woolf and Musil, to Robert Walser and Alfred Döblin.²

In what follows I shall discuss the flâneur in dialogue with other modernist figurations of walking that mobilise a much older enquiry into the human gait that begins in the 18th and leads into the 19th century where its path branches into literary and scientific strands. In the light of this rich discourse I then turn to modern figurations of walking in texts by Kafka and Thomas Mann before concluding with the figure of the female flâneur, or flâneuse, in a novel by the German interwar writer Irmgard Keun who draws these different strands together.

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In the 18th century, bourgeois society discovered walking as an emancipatory practice.³ The emerging middle classes aimed to distinguish themselves both from the artificial codes of aristocratic society and from the working classes for whom—until the arrival

¹ As Wolfgang Schivelbusch (2004) has shown, the invention of gas and electric lighting and the advent of neon lights turned the modern city into a veritable showcase demanding fleeting scopophilic attention. A myriad of images, headlines, posters and advertisements also brought forth a new 'word city' which overlaid the built city with unstable text. See Peter Fritzsche ([1900] 1996).

² Georg Simmel, analyses how the metropolitan self is bombarded by quickly changing stimuli and fractured sensations that succeed each other in sharp discontinuity. For Simmel, such dramatic 'intensification of nervous stimulation' (1997: 175) requires the development of a protective mechanism through a blasé outlook that disconnects the individual from the depth of feelings. See Georg Simmel (1995; 1997). On flânerie see Anke Gleber (1999).

³ On the history of walking see also Johann-Günther König (2013); Rebecca Solnit (2001). On walking and writing see Merlin Coverley (2012); Frédéric Gros (2015).

of modern mass transportation—walking remained an economic necessity. Bourgeois modes of ambulation ranged from Sunday promenading in urban environments and landscaped parks to more solitary walks in nature and, from the early 19th century, daring mountaineering expeditions into the Swiss Alps, the Lake District, the Welsh peaks or the Scottish Highlands. In the course of the 18th century, walking thus transmuted from a merely practical and goal-oriented necessity into a deliberate and culturally encoded practice that also gave expression to the Enlightenment aspirations for political freedom and self-realisation. And so it is that in the 18th-century debate on the art of walking, educational, philosophical and medical arguments about the natural gait overlap. In this context the old method of leading a young child with various tethering devices—in German this is called *gängeln*—fell out of fashion: *gängeln* was a very old practice of teaching a toddler how to walk by means of various walking aids and contraptions, such as the *Gängelband* (a lead) and the *Gängelwagen* (child walker) as depicted in Rubens' charming Painting of the Artist with his wife Hélène Fourment who is holding on to their son Frans by a lead (figure 1). Or there is the 17th-century illustrated school book by the educationist Johann Amos Comenius: a woodcut shows children of various ages learning different tasks, including a young toddler in a child walker (figure 2). Child walkers were still in use at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴

Returning to the German term *gängeln*, the word and practice assumed extremely negative connotations in German Enlightenment discourse where they began to denote patronising or infantilising behaviour and the 'subjugation of man's free will'.⁵ In the first chapter of his *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'* Immanuel Kant famously uses the image of the oppressive *Gängelwagen* (child walker) to capture man's state of immature docility and his lack of freedom.

Daß der bei weitem größte Teil der Menschen (darunter das ganze schöne Geschlecht) den Schritt zur Mündigkeit, außer dem daß er beschwerlich ist, auch für sehr gefährlich halte: dafür sorgen schon jene Vormünder, die die Oberraufsicht über sie gütigst auf sich genommen haben. Nachdem sie ihr Hausvieh zuerst dumm gemacht haben und sorgfältig verhüteten, daß diese ruhigen Geschöpfe ja keinen Schritt außer dem Gängelwagen, darin sie sie einsperrten, wagen durften, so zeigen sie ihnen nachher die Gefahr, die ihnen droht, wenn sie es versuchen allein zu gehen. Nun ist diese Gefahr zwar eben so groß nicht, denn sie würden durch einigemal Fallen wohl endlich gehen lernen; allein ein Beispiel von der Art macht doch schüchtern und schreckt gemeinhin von allen ferneren Versuchen ab.⁶

⁴Johann Amos Comenius (1658).

⁵In Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch* we thus find the following examples: 'von Weibern und Kastraten sein Leben lang gegängelt wie ein Kind' (Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock; 'to be ruled by women and eunuchs one's whole life like a child'); 'Die Vernunft muss sich nicht am Leitbände ... gängeln lassen' (Christoph Martin Wieland; 'reason must not be harnessed by a walking-lead'); 'Die Handlung nicht gegängelt, sondern durch Freiheit belebt' (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; 'action must not be string-led but enlivened by freedom'). See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1854–1961).

⁶Immanuel Kant ([1784] 1999: 20).



Figure 1. Peter Paul Rubens, His Wife Helena Fourment (1614–1673), and Their Son Frans (1633–1678), 80 1/4 x 62 1/4 in. (203.8 x 158.1 cm), ca. 1635. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 2. Johann Amos Comenius, *Societas Parentalis in Orbis sensualium pictus* (1658).

The guardians who have kindly taken upon themselves the work of supervision will soon see to it that by far the largest part of mankind (including the entire fair sex) should consider the step forward to maturity not only as difficult but also as highly dangerous. Having first infatuated their domesticated animals, and carefully prevented the docile creatures from daring to take a single step without the leading strings to which they are tied, they next show them the danger which threatens them if they try to walk unaided. Now this danger is not in fact so very great, for they would certainly learn to walk eventually after a few falls. But an example of this kind is intimidating, and usually frightens them off from further attempts.⁷

As all parents know, a child's bipedal development begins with the baby's rolling over, crawling on all fours and bottom-shuffling—stages which then lead to various attempts to pull themselves up, cruising around larger objects and, finally, the first uncertain strides with their feet wide apart. Unsupported walking (often at top speed) is normally reached between the age of 12 and 18 months. Even though Kant abridges these developmental stages, the passage quoted above refers to an innate learning process that captures human development: the enslavement of the four-legged animal must be overcome by man's bipedalism and his unsupported, upright and forward-moving gait. The setbacks encountered on the road to maturity are for Kant as unavoidable as a toddler's countless tumbles. While Kant employs walking metaphorically for the

⁷Immanuel Kant (1991: 1–2).

process of self-enlightenment, Darwin's theory of bipedalism turned the upright gait into a key moment of evolutionary progress: the upright gait emerged, Darwin reasoned, when our ancestors started using their hands to fashion and employ tools and hunting weapons. By contrast, the later 'savanna theory' suggested that as Africa dried out millions of years ago and grasslands replaced forests, two-legged walking may have offered a more efficient way for an ape to travel across an open landscape. Mankind's evolutionary progress finds representation in the so-called Darwin chart which (falsely) suggests a linear development towards bipedalism.⁸

But let us return to the 18th century and the great theorist and practitioner of walking, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was Rousseau who elevated walking into a true mode of philosophical reflection and introspective self-discovery that could liberate the oppressed self from the detrimental influences of corrupt society.⁹ Because for Rousseau society is governed by the debilitating norms of courteous behaviour, he advocates solitary walking as a way of recuperating an authentic connection with one's innermost self. In Book Nine of the *Confessions* (1782) he states: 'je ne puis méditer qu'en marchant; sitôt que je m'arrête, je ne pense plus, et ma tête ne va qu'avec mes pieds' ('I can meditate only when walking; as soon as I stop I can no longer think, for my mind moves only when my feet do').¹⁰ And in the Second Walk of *The Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (Reveries of a Solitary Walker, 1782) he observes: 'Ces heures de solitude et de méditation sont les seules de la journée où je sois pleinement moi et à moi sans diversion, sans obstacle, et où je puisse véritablement dire être ce que la nature a voulu' ('These hours of solitude and meditation are the only time of the day when I am completely myself, without distraction and hindrance, and when I can truly say that I am what nature intended me to be').¹¹ The experience of an authentic self also prepares the ground for the detailed observation of the intricacies of nature: in the Fifth Walk Rousseau recounts how he went botanising on the Swiss island of St Pierre equipped with his magnifying glass and a copy of Linnaeus' *Systema naturae*. Besides its therapeutic goal, walking in nature was for Rousseau and his contemporaries an indispensable mode of geographical, botanical and geological exploration of the natural world.¹² And there is of course the famous Easter Walk in Goethe's *Faust*

⁸The problem with this theory is that hominids began to walk upright six to seven million years ago. Tools only show up much later. A more recent theory responds to finds of early hominid fossils in places where frequent tectonic activity created rocky, jagged environments. Scrambling up steep hills and uneven terrain might have given early hominids evolutionary advantages, such as finding new food supplies and escaping predators that couldn't climb. See Isabelle C. Winder *et al.* (2013: 333–49).

⁹In his educational novel ([1762] 2008) Rousseau ridiculed the unnatural gait of immature grown-ups who as small children had been string-led for too long.

¹⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([1782]: 413; 2000: 400).

¹¹Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([1780–89] 2012; 2011: 11).

¹²On the history of mountaineering see Robert MacFarlane (2009).

which also stages the temporary recovery of the exhausted intellectual in a rejuvenating, largely cultivated nature which can be found outside the town gates.¹³

While Rousseau explored solitary walking in nature as a central condition for the aesthetic and therapeutic experience of socially unattainable freedom, the Swiss Johann Caspar Lavater propagated physiognomy as an empirical method that offered access to man's moral qualities. Lavater's empirical study of physiognomy as an expression of man's moral qualities also had implications for the human gait. His main aim was to decipher the 'unwillkürliche Natursprache im Antlitze' ('the involuntary natural language of the human face') by interweaving the description of facial and bodily features with their moral interpretation.¹⁴ Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* (Physiognomic Fragments) of 1775 included many illustrations by Daniel Chodowicki whose graphic representations are meant to make visible distinctive moral features in physiognomic appearance. But Lavater's anthropological enquiry also extended to the entire human body, in which he discerned a moral inventory of human nature.¹⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that he should comment on the human gait, as in the following rather misogynist description of a woman's walk.

Ist der Gang eines Weibes fatal, entschieden fatal, nicht nur unangenehm, sondern impetuös, schief, ohne Würde, verächtelnd, seitwärts vordrängend—so reizte dich weder eine Schönheit an ihr, noch täusche dich ihr Verstand, noch locke: dich ihr Vertrauen. Ihr Mund wird seyn, wie ihr Gang, und ihr Betragen hart und falsch, wie ihr Mund.¹⁶

If a woman's walk is forceful, overly decisive, not only disagreeable but impetuous, crooked, without dignity, and scornful, if she pushes forward with a sideward step—don't be taken in by her beauty nor by her intelligence, nor be seduced by her trust. Her mouth will be like her gait, and her behaviour rigid and deceitful like her mouth.
(My translation)

Honoré de Balzac's *Theorie de la démarche* (Theory of Walking) stands at the end of the physiognomic tradition. It was published in 1833 as part of his social pathology. Balzac's aim was to write a rulebook about ambulatory movement that would make possible the classification of human types. Observing Parisian pedestrians from a stationary position, he wanted to capture and classify all variations of the human gait. Faced, however, with the countless shades of social pathologies that he discovered across class boundaries, he ended up reflecting on the difficulty of categorising human

¹³ See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1982: 35–36).

¹⁴ Johann Caspar Lavater (1775a: 33).

¹⁵ Johann Caspar Lavater (1775b).

¹⁶ Johann Caspar Lavater (1991: LXXIV).

movement through description, and he abandoned his project with the following observation:

Sur deux cent cinquante–quatre personnes et demie (car je compte un monsieur sans jambes pour une fraction) dont j’analysai la démarche, je ne trouvai pas une personne qui eût des mouvements gracieux et naturels.¹⁷

Of the two hundred and fifty-four and a half persons whose gait I studied—I am counting a man without legs only as half a person—I have not found one who moved gracefully and naturally. (My translation)

This rich discourse on walking acquired an additional facet when free ambulatory movement across national boundaries began to stand for political freedom. The political interpretation of free walking was especially prominent in Germany where, after the French Revolution, the old feudal order stood for political repression and stagnation. In 1803 Johann Gottfried Seume published his travelogue *Spaziergang nach Syrakus* (A Stroll to Syracuse), which recounts his long-distance journey on foot from Germany to Sicily in 1801. For Seume walking entails freedom, autonomy and agency precisely because it reconnects man with an ‘authentic humanity’ which he conceives in republican terms. In his later travelogue *Mein Sommer 1805* (*My Summer of 1805*, published in 1806) Seume contrasts the freedom and self-determination of the natural and upright gait explicitly with the passivity of the entrapped passenger in a coach whose vision and experience of the world is seriously curtailed:

So wie man im Wagen sitzt, hat man sich sogleich einige Grade von der ursprünglichen Humanität entfernt. Man kann niemandem mehr fest und rein ins Angesicht sehen, wie man soll. ... Fahren zeigt Ohnmacht, Gehen Kraft.¹⁸

As soon as you sit inside a coach, you have removed yourself by some degrees from your authentic humanity. You can’t countenance anybody any more in a firm and pure way as you should ... Being carried in a coach is a sign of impotence, walking a sign of vigour. (My translation)

In contrast to Seume’s republican leanings, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn pursued nationalist aims. He founded the German gymnasts’ movement in the early 19th century, which quickly gained popularity amongst young German males. Jahn aimed to overcome the perceived emasculation suffered under French cultural domination and, especially, Napoleonic rule by reinvigorating German manliness, freedom and national unity through sport. Jahn’s manifesto *Die Deutsche Turnkunst* (The German Art of

¹⁷Honoré de Balzac (1833: 61).

¹⁸Johann Gottfried Seume ([1806] 1993: 543).

Gymnastics) of 1816 also contained a chapter on the ‘art of good walking’ which, as Jahn argues, depends upon training from early childhood and continual practice. For Jahn good walking is characterised by four traits: moral uprightness of the gait (‘Anstand im Gange’),¹⁹ endurance (‘Dauer im Gehen’),²⁰ speed (‘Schnelle des Ganges’)²¹ and—somewhat surprisingly—the walker’s indifference to the territory (‘Nichtachtung der Örtlichkeit’).²² I cannot possibly sketch here the medical discourse on walking in the 19th century, which, as Andreas Mayer has shown, was particularly prominent in France and Germany where interest in mechanical physiology fostered an experimental approach to the study of the human gait. Suffice it to say that publications in this field also attracted the attention of the military which attempted to optimise the marching abilities of their troops by regulating the length of the soldier’s pace and the number of paces per minute.²³

To recapitulate, we have seen that the late 18th century discovered walking first as a mode of philosophical reflection on the road to enlightened maturity; second as an aesthetic experience that re-attuned man with nature; third as a restorative practice that engendered harmony between body and soul; fourth as a mode of scientific exploration of the natural environment; and finally as a political act that could help to realise republican freedom or national unity.

Even though this discourse on walking did not result in a unified anthropology of the human gait, it established a fundamental distinction between good and bad practices of walking: the good gait is deemed to be natural, upright and forward-moving, free from artificial mannerism and affectation; it engenders an invigorating agility of body and mind that attunes man to his authentic humanity and to nature. And it gives expression to man’s unstoppable evolutionary progress and his ability to attain enlightened freedom. By contrast, the bad gait is unnatural; it manifests itself in the walker’s poor bodily coordination, a bent-over posture, a sideways stride and unnecessary movements of the arms and legs, which were associated with a wide range of psychological and moral defects.

From the late 18th century, the wide-ranging discourse on walking encodes the bad gait as a symptom of a crippling process of civilisation, which had alienated man from the attainment of self-determination and freedom. It is certainly no coincidence that in the context of rapid technological innovation—above all the development of the steam engine and then the railway system in the early 19th century—walking

¹⁹ See Friedrich Ludwig Jahn & Ernst Eiselen (1816: 3).

²⁰ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn & Ernst Eiselen (1816: 4).

²¹ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn & Ernst Eiselen (1816: 5).

²² Friedrich Ludwig Jahn & Ernst Eiselen (1816: 5).

²³ After the Seven Years War, military debates defined new rules for different types of gaits, such as the *pas ordinaire*, the *pas doublé* and the *pas triplé ou de course*. Comte de Guibert emphasised the need for a natural movement that drew on anatomical studies of the time. On this issue see Andreas Mayer (2013: 41–49).

became a prime concern of educationists, anthropologists, medical experts and political reformers alike. As everything solid began to melt into air—to paraphrase Marx—the debate on the correct pace and the correct gait filtered specifically modern anxieties about a runaway world.²⁴ In this process, walking transmutes from an innate ability into a rich discourse that explores the pace and direction of modernity alongside competing notions of what constitutes the morally good life. In the following section I want to show how these psychological, philosophical and moral interpretations of bad practices of walking resurface in literary modernism.

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Kafka is an excellent point of departure because in texts from *Der Verschollene* (*The Man who Disappeared*),²⁵ *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) to *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*) and *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*), he employs figurations of walking that draw on this rich discourse. Let me start with *The Metamorphosis*: at the beginning of the novella Gregor Samsa wakes up from troubled dreams to find himself transformed into a giant beetle which, instead of responding to his amazing new bodily existence, bemoans his harried life as a travelling salesman, the job that forces him to get up early, rush for train connections, and put up with continual dealings with strangers. Alarmed at having missed the 5 o'clock train, Gregor is fretting about the repercussions of running late when his parents and sister begin to knock on the three doors of his room. Responding to such prompt enforcement of the modern rule of the clock, Gregor then helplessly attempts to master his new body, especially the numerous little legs which are continuously moving in all directions and which he cannot control:

Er hätte Arme und Hände gebraucht, um sich aufzurichten; statt dessen aber hatte er nur die vielen Beinchen, die ununterbrochen in der verschiedensten Bewegung waren und die er überdies nicht beherrschen konnte. Wollte er eines einmal einknicken, so war es das erste, daß es sich streckte; und gelang es ihm endlich, mit diesem Bein das auszuführen, was er wollte, so arbeiteten inzwischen alle anderen, wie freigelassen, in höchster, schmerzlicher Aufregung. (DV, 97)²⁶

²⁴On the politics of time in modernity see Marshall Berman (1982; 2010); Stephen Kern (2003); Peter Osborne (1995); Anne Fuchs & Jonathan Long (2016).

²⁵The novel was posthumously published by Max Brod in 1927 under the catchy title *Amerika*. Set in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, it thematises the disciplinary regime of modernity through the fate of the young protagonist Karl Rossmann who is dispatched to America by his parents as an act of punishment. On his arrival in New York he appears to be miraculously saved by his wealthy Uncle Jakob, a self-made entrepreneur who takes him under his wing. After a minor act of disobedience he is expelled once more and ends up walking along the American highway with the vagrants Delamarche and Robinson. In the context of the technologically driven America, Kafka employs the motif of walking as symbol of Karl's social degradation. See Anne Fuchs (2006). On the motif of travelling see John Zilcosky (2003).

²⁶Franz Kafka, 'Die Verwandlung' (1994: 97). Henceforth cited in the text as 'DV' followed by the page number.

He would have needed arms and hands to raise himself; but instead of those, he had only these many little legs, which were continually fluttering about, and which he could not control anyhow. If he tried to bend one of them, it was the first to stretch; and if he finally managed this leg to do what he wanted, all the others were flapping about meanwhile in the most intense and painful excitement, as if they had been let loose.²⁷

Instead of adapting to the creaturely reality of a beetle, he continues to attempt to hoist himself out of bed in order to live up to his role as obedient son and breadwinner. As long as Gregor disregards his new physical reality, he will be unable ‘in diese Willkür Ruhe und Ordnung zu bringen’ (DV, 98; to bring order and calmness into this chaos). There is, however, one rare moment of joy, when Gregor, after having finally mastered his new bodily functions, discovers that he enjoys crawling freely across the ceiling:

Und so nahm er zur Zerstreuung die Gewohnheit an, kreuz und quer über Wände und Plafond zu kriechen. Besonders oben auf der Decke hing er gern; es war ganz anders, als das Liegen auf dem Fußboden, man atmete freier; ein leichtes Schwingen ging durch den Körper; und in der fast glücklichen Zerstreuung, in der sich Gregor dort oben befand, konnte es geschehen, daß er zu seiner eigenen Überraschung sich losließ und auf den Boden klatschte. (DV, 126–127)

And so for diversion he developed the habit of crawling all over the walls and ceiling. He was particularly fond of hanging high up under the ceiling. This was something different from lying on the floor; one breathed more freely; an easy swinging motion passed through his body; and in this almost happy state of distraction up there, it could happen that to his own surprise he would let go and fall smack! to the ground.²⁸

Here Kafka evokes a new natural state which could reverse the negative effects of an alienating modernity: if only Gregor could adapt to his new status, his ‘etwas zu kleines Menschenzimmer’ (‘room that was a little too small for humans’) would be transformed into a vast expanse for a bug. But of course he fails to escape into a new existence in which unselfconscious crawling would engender creaturely happiness. After his death and the crude disposal of his emaciated remains, it is the other members of the Samsa family who decide to skip work and spend the day walking in the countryside.

In Kafka’s *The Trial* we encounter Josef K., the quintessential modern Western man whose life is regimented by a rigid timetable: after work in the bank until nine o’clock, he takes a short walk to a public house where he spends the evening in the

²⁷ Franz Kafka (2009a: 32).

²⁸ Franz Kafka (2009a: 52).

company of professionally important men until eleven o'clock at night. Apart from that there is his weekly visit to Elsa, a waitress who also works as a prostitute, and at weekends he accepts the odd invitation by his boss (DP, 26).²⁹ The absence of proper friends, family and intimate relations in K.'s life is striking: even his leisure is dominated by calculated pursuit of advantage and exploitative relations with others. And so it is not surprising that Kafka stages K.'s outings on foot in opposition to the flâneur, who, according to Walter Benjamin, is a slow and meandering drifter in the crowd who goes 'botanizing on the asphalt'.³⁰ The flâneur is fascinated by marginal details, discarded objects and kaleidoscopic impressions of everyday life which he transforms into 'significant traces of the material dimensions of culture and history'.³¹ In contrast to the meandering flâneur, K. never takes a non-goal-oriented walk. He is blind to the dazzling and transitory visual impressions of the city which so fascinate the flâneur. And so it is that the various locations in the novel, such as K.'s lodgings, the bank building where he works, the court office and Advokat Huld's apartment remain disconnected from one another and cannot be placed on a virtual map. In keeping with K.'s striking lack of interest in the urban environment, it is particularly significant that he decides to walk to his first court interrogation instead of taking the tram.³² While initially he planned to walk slowly and arrive late, he ends up running the last stretch so that he will get there by nine o'clock (DP, 43). His inability to adopt a proper pace is indicative of a misguided sense of autonomy that, in the end, will cost him his life. But K.'s sense of self-determination is gradually eroded: when he visits the court offices in the company of the court usher the Sunday after his first court hearing, he is overcome by debilitating exhaustion which drives him to implore the court usher to escort him immediately back to the exit. The episode ends with K. being propped up by a young woman and the Information clerk as he is being dragged to the door:

... plötzlich fühlte er die Hand des Auskunftgebers an einem Arm und die Hand des Mädchens am andern. 'Also auf, Sie schwacher Mann', sagte der Auskunftgeber. 'Ich danke Ihnen beiden vielmals', sagte K. freudig überrascht, erhob sich langsam und führte selbst die fremden Hände an die Stellen, wo er die Stütze am meisten brauchte. (DP, 71)

²⁹ Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß. Roman in der Fassung der Handschrift* (1995). Henceforth cited in the text as 'DP' followed by the page number.

³⁰ However, Benjamin's often-cited claim that around 1840 it was fashionable in Paris to take turtles for a walk in the arcades has not been historically corroborated. See Rebecca Solnit (2001: 200).

³¹ Anke Gleber (1999: 51–52).

³² On the Sunday in question he nearly oversleeps because he had stayed out drinking until late in the night. Rushing out without breakfast to make up for lost time, he comes across Rabensteiner and Kullich who are travelling in a tram that crosses K.'s route, while Kammerer is sitting on the terrace of a café, leaning over the wall. All of them seem to be surprised at seeing their superior now running on foot.

... suddenly he felt the information clerk's hand on one arm and the young woman's on the other. 'Up you get, you weak man,' said the information clerk. 'Thank you both very much,' said K. pleasantly surprised. He stood up slowly and put the others' hands on the places where he most needed support.³³

And a little later we read:

Er war ihnen ausgeliefert, ließen sie ihn los, so musste er hinfallen wie ein Brett. ... ihre gleichmäßigen Schritte fühlte K. ohne sie mitzumachen, denn er wurde fast von Schritt zu Schritt getragen. (DP, 84–85)

He was completely dependent on them, if they were to let go he would fall down like a plank of wood. ... K. could feel their regular steps without taking any himself, for he was more or less carried from one step to the next. (TT, 57)

In his dependence on guardians who need to escort or *gänglich* him to the door, K. appears as the walking embodiment of Kant's immature creature. The motif of being led along or *gegängelt* recurs once more in the final chapter when K. is collected by two man-handlers who walk him to his place of execution. They force him to walk stretched between them as they seize K.'s hands with a well-practised and irresistible grip (DP, 237):

Sie hielten die Schultern eng hinter den seinen, knickten die Arme nicht ein, sondern benützten sie, um K.s Arme in ihrer ganzen Länge zu umschlingen, unten erfaßten sie K.s Hände mit einem schulmäßigen, eingeübten, unwiderstehlichen Griff. K. gieng straff gestreckt zwischen ihnen, sie bildeten jetzt alle drei eine solche Einheit, daß wenn man einen von ihnen erschlagen hätte, alle zerschlagen gewesen wären. (DP, 237)

They put their shoulder close behind his and didn't bend their arms, but used them to entwine the whole length of his arm, grasping K.'s hands at the bottom in an irresistible, practiced textbook grip. K. walked between them, stiffly upright, the three of them forming such a single unit that knocking one down would have meant knocking all of them down. (TT, 161)

At first K. tries to regain a sense of self-direction by refusing to walk on. However, he gives up all resistance when he notices how a young woman, who resembles his acquaintance Fräulein Bürstner, climbs up a flight of stairs from a narrow lane.³⁴

³³ Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. by Mike Mitchell (2009b: 55–56). Henceforth cited as 'TT' followed by the page number.

³⁴ After his arrest and a conversation with his landlady, Frau Grubach, K. decides to await the return of Fräulein Bürstner, a young woman who is one of Frau Grubach's lodgers. After re-enacting his earlier encounter with the wardens in front of Fräulein Bürstner, K. kisses her in vampire-like fashion on the throat. On Fräulein Bürstner see Britta Maché (1992: 18–34); Elizabeth Boa (1996: 195–203).

Because his two handlers now allow him to choose the route, K. follows the young woman ahead of them, not because he wants to catch up with her but ‘um die Mahnung, die sie für ihn bedeutete nicht zu vergessen’ (DP, 237; so as ‘not to forget the admonition she represented for him’, TT, 162). The young woman, who may well be Fräulein Bürstner, represents a moment of hope precisely because her pathway takes her in a different direction from K. who, at the very end, is led to his place of execution where he is slain like a dog.

Thomas Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1913) brings into view another failing male walker in the figure of the highly esteemed writer Gustav von Aschenbach, who changes from a city walker in Munich into a stalker in Venice. At the beginning of the novella Aschenbach undertakes a risk-free walk through the English Garden in Munich to overcome his nervous disposition, sleeplessness and intellectual exhaustion.³⁵ He is not the purposeless flâneur who ‘views time as a continuum for his unmeasured drifting’³⁶ but a bourgeois walker seeking mental and physical restoration on a familiar and circular pathway that will take him back to where he started, his home in Munich’s wealthy Prinzregentenstrasse. However, it is precisely the bounded and socially exclusive nature of Aschenbach’s cultural geography which is then abruptly thrown into disarray. His encounter with the uncanny stranger at the end of Chapter One already stages a displacement of the geographical boundaries that have structured Aschenbach’s life: the stranger’s appearance merges local with exotic traits, exuding something ‘Wandererhaftes’ (a sense of nomadic unsettledness) that releases in Aschenbach a sense of unrest and a youthful thirst for distant scenes.³⁷ Like Goethe and countless travellers before him, Aschenbach then travels south along the well-established route to Italy. He ends up in venerable Venice which, however, immediately emanates a sense of foreboding: the heavy air, the sultry stench in the streets, the smell of cooking oil mixed with perfume symbolise a state of infectious transgression that will corrupt and kill Aschenbach.³⁸ And so it is that Venice is the stage on which Aschenbach turns into a furtive stalker pursuing the beautiful boy Tadzio through the labyrinthine network of canals, across bridges, down narrow alleyways and into dirty cul-de-sacs. As Elizabeth Boa notes, ‘Venice shifts in aspect along with the changing mood and intensity of Aschenbach’s desire.’³⁹

Interestingly, Aschenbach’s degeneration into a stalker coincides with Tadzio’s metamorphosis into a self-consciously elegant walker. Early on Aschenbach’s fascination with Tadzio’s graceful gait finds expression in the following passage:

³⁵These symptoms point to the condition which was debated under the heading of neurasthenia at the time. See Matthias Uecker (2002).

³⁶Anke Gleber (1999: 26).

³⁷Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig. Novelle* (1992: 13). Henceforth cited in the text as ‘TiV’.

³⁸On this symbolism see Boa (2006: 29).

³⁹Boa (2006: 30).

Er kam durch die Glastür und ging in Stille schräg durch den Raum zum Tisch seiner Schwestern. Sein Gehen war sowohl in der Haltung des Oberkörpers wie in der Bewegung der Kniee, dem Aufsetzen des weißbeschuhten Fußes von außerordentlicher Anmut, sehr leicht, zugleich zart und stolz und verschönt noch durch die kindliche Verschämtheit, in welcher er zweimal unterwegs, mit einer Kopfwendung in den Saal, die Augen aufschlug und senkte. (TiV, 56–57)

He entered through the glass doors and passed diagonally across the room to his sisters at their table. He walked with extraordinary grace—the carriage of the body, the movement of the knee, the way he set down his foot in its white shoe—it was all so light, it was at once dainty and proud, enhanced by the childish shyness which made him twice turn his head as he crossed the room, made him give a quick glance and then drop his eyes. (My translation)

Tadzio's glance is a first hint of his pubescent sexual awareness and cockiness. Gradually he responds to Aschenbach's erotic interest by turning himself into a teenage model moving on the beach as on a catwalk. Note how in the following passage Tadzio fashions a particular look through a slow and deliberate gait that is choreographed:

... da war es der schöne Knabe, der von links kommend vor ihm im Sande vorüberging. Er ging barfuß, zum Waten bereit, die schlanken Beine bis übers Knie entblößt, langsam, aber so leicht und stolz, als sei er ohne Schuhwerk sich zu bewegen ganz gewöhnt, und schaute sich nach den querstehenden Hütten um (...). (TiV, 60).

... it was the lovely boy who crossed his vision coming from the left along the sand. He was barefoot, ready for wading, the slender legs uncovered above the knee, and moved slowly, yet with such a proud, light tread as to make it seem he had never worn shoes. (My translation)

Tadzio's daily appearance gains an ever-more performative quality as he begins to saunter past Aschenbach's regular spot, sometimes so close as almost to touch his table or chair. Here the beach turns into an arena for a casting show in which Tadzio parades his styled body before Aschenbach's desiring gaze. Aware of Aschenbach's longing, Tadzio's demeanour shifts from the instinctive grace of a cat towards the model's performative self-consciousness and allure. In Mann's narrative, then, the motif of stalking and Tadzio's performance of 'cat walking' on the beach bring forth a daring economy of looking that turns the male body into an object of the male gaze. The novella ends with Aschenbach's death after his final sighting of Tadzio in the distance on the beach. As Tadzio seems to tease Aschenbach once more by looking over his shoulder back at where Aschenbach is seated, Aschenbach dies as he attempts to rise from his chair to follow him.

Irmgard Keun's interwar novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl; 1932) features eighteen-year-old Doris who gives up her job as a typist in Cologne and runs off to Berlin.⁴⁰ Doris decides to write a journal in which her life will unfold in cinematic pictures: 'Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein' (DkM, 8; 'But I want to write like a movie because my life is like that and it's going to become even more so'). Arriving in the big city without a home, a job or any papers, Doris is determined to become a *Glanz*, a glamorous woman who no longer needs to earn her wages in lowly paid jobs but will be kept in style by adoring men who are willing to pay for her good looks. Doris sees through the double standards of a society that accepts the commodification of women through marriage, she therefore decides to use her sex appeal in order to strike it big: 'Ich will so der Glanz werden, der oben ist. Mit weißem Auto und Badewasser, das nach Parfüm riecht, und alles wie Paris' (DkM, 45; 'I want to become a star. I want to be at the top. With a white car and bubble bath that smells of perfume, and everything just like in Paris'). Being a *Glanz* constitutes for Doris the pinnacle of achievement in a culture that is dominated by the right look.

The central section of the novel then traces her fortunes in turbulent Berlin where she saunters through the streets in search of fashionable goods, visual thrills and electrifying diversions. Indeed, Doris does manage to create a cinematic vision that, in montage-like fashion, foregrounds the visual appeal of the big city:

Ich habe gesehen—ein Mann mit einem Plakat um den Hals: 'Ich nehme jede Arbeit'—und 'jede' dreimal rot unterstrichen—... es gab eine Frau ihm zehn Pfennig, die waren gelb, und er rollte sie auf das Pflaster, das Schein hat durch Reklame von Kinos und Lokalen. Und das Plakat war weiß mit Schwarz drauf. Und viele Zeitungen und sehr bunt und das Tempo rosa-lila und Nachtausgabe mit rotem Strich und ein gelber Querstrich. Und sehe das Kempinsky mit edlem Holz und Taxis davor mit weißen Karos und Chauffeur mit eingeknicktem Kopf, weil sie ja immer warten. ... Und auch mal Bars und ein großes Licht hoch über der Erde von Kupferberg Sekt—und einer mit Streichhölzern und auf der Erde mit schwarzen Beinen—quer übers Pflaster und Schachteln von Streichhölzern, die sind blau mit weiß und kleiner roter Rand. (DkM, 101–102)

I saw—a man with a sign around his neck, 'I will accept any work' with 'any' underlined three times in red—...—and a woman gave him ten pfennigs, the coin was yellow and he rolled it on the pavement in which it was reflected because of the advertisements of the cinemas and nightclubs. And the poster was white with black on top. And lots of newspapers and the Tempo magazine in pink and purple and the night edition with a red line and a yellow slash. And I see the Kempinski with its noble

⁴⁰Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (2011). Henceforth cited as 'DkM'. For a nuanced interpretation of the pleasure-seeking woman see Boa (2009).

wood panels and the taxis in front with white chequers and the drivers with a bent head because they have to wait all the time. And then night bars and a big light high above by Kupferberg, the sparkling wine—and a chap with match sticks sitting on the ground with his black legs across the pavement and boxes of matchsticks, which are blue and white with a small red edge. (My translation)

Doris offers us—in the words of Patrizia McBride—‘a survey of life in the metropolis that clings to the surface of things’.⁴¹ But even though Doris relishes the city as spectacle, she is also acutely aware of disastrous social inequality, mass unemployment and the threat of social degradation. The above passage ends with the figure of the match seller whose legs are stretched across the pavement, an image which evokes Otto Dix’s famous painting *The Match Seller* of 1920 (figure 3). Keun’s and Dix’s squatting match sellers symbolise the crippling long-term effects of World War One which haunted and, in the end ruined, the Weimar Republic. Because Doris has an astute eye and an acute social conscience, she begins to share her impressions of the city with a blind war veteran called Brenner. In one of her journal entries she declares: ‘Ich sammle Sehen für ihn. Ich gucke mir alle Straßen an und Lokale und Leute und Laternen. Und dann merke ich mir mein Sehen und bringe es ihm mit’ (DkM, 96–97; ‘I collect impressions for him. I go out and look at all streets and restaurants and people and lanterns. And then I record what I have seen and bring it to him’). Doris’s vivid renditions of city life are punctured by Brenner’s chorus-like demand for further descriptions—‘Was siehst du noch, was siehst du noch?’ (DkM, 102; ‘What else do you see, what else?’)—which lends the exchange an operatic quality. The success of Doris’s project to share her visual wealth with Brenner depends on the translation of her visual impressions into vivid narration. When she takes Brenner for a real walk through Berlin the day before he is taken to a home for the blind, the promise of *Glanz* (glamour) turns into disenchantment. As Doris drags him from one highlight of Berlin’s nightlife to the next, Brenner falls silent.⁴² However, we should acknowledge that in spite of this apparent failure to retranslate an imaginary experience into reality, her narration is nevertheless an ethical and generous form of sharing the world with a blind man.

By the end of the novel, Doris too is walking the streets as a homeless person along with numerous tired and hungry prostitutes:

⁴¹ Patrizia McBride (2011: 226).

⁴² See also Patrizia McBride who emphasises the aural dimension of Doris’s story-telling: ‘it becomes clear that the aural experience of storytelling was as much fun for the visually impaired Brenner as the vicarious seeing mediated by Doris’s stories. In other words: Doris’s narrativized seeing could be experienced as pleasure by a man with a heightened sense of hearing precisely because it was mediated by her voice’ (2011: 234). While this observation is correct at the intradiegetic level, this is less so extradiegetically because the reader can also enjoy Doris’s visual narration. It is the direct experience of an unmediated reality which collapses the epistemological and ontological gap which is precondition for the imaginary effect created by literature.



Figure 3. Otto Dix, *Streichholzhändler*, 1920; Inv.Nr. 772, 141.5 × 166.0 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

sie machen so einen unentschlossenen Gang—das ist gar nicht immer ein Gesicht, was eine Hure ausmacht—ich sehe in meinen Spiegel—das ist eine Art von Gehen, wie wenn einem das Herz eingeschlafen ist.

Ging ich langsam an der Gedächtnisstraße vorbei, Tauentzienstraße runter, immer so weiter und mit einer Gleichgültigkeit in meinen Kniekehlen, und da war somit mein Gehen ein Stehenbleiben zwischen einem Weitergehewollen und einem Zurückgehewollen, indem ich zu keinem von beiden Lust hatte. (DKM, 144)

They walk in such a hesitant way. It's not always the face that makes a whore—I am looking into my mirror—it's the way they walk, as if their heart had gone to sleep.

So I was slowly walking past the Memorial Church, down Tauentzienstraße, walking further and further with a feeling of indifference in the backs of my knees and thus my walking was a kind of staying in place between wanting to walk further and a desire to walk back again, in that I really did not want to do either.

Doris's intoxication with the visual spectacle of the city is clearly over. Her indecisive, directionless and above all indifferent gait shows that she has lost interest in the urban spectacle of visual appearances. Stuck between a frightening future and an undesirable past, her irresolute gait marks the end of the Enlightenment optimism that man's upright walk will lead to freedom and maturity.

*

In conclusion: Gregor Samsa, Josef K. and Gustav von Aschenbach are protagonists whose natural gait is seriously impaired: Samsa's metamorphosis into a large insect comes with the possibility of creaturely pleasure, but he cannot reverse evolutionary development and return to a natural state. Unlike Rotpeter—the speaking ape in Kafka's *Bericht für eine Akademie* (*Report to an Academy*, 1917) who finds an *Ausweg*, an escape route from the state of enslavement by mimicking man—Gregor does not manage to do the opposite and embrace a new life as a happy bug: his human consciousness cripples and entraps him in social obligations and work-related alienation. And so it is that the pleasure of crawling across the ceiling of his room remains a fleeting episode. Josef K. on the other hand is convinced that he is a man standing upright at the end of evolutionary progress. His sense of autonomy makes him believe that he can determine the direction and pace of his gait, while in reality he ends up being *gegängelt*—led like a dependent child who has not yet mastered the pathway to enlightened maturity. Shortly before the end there is a glimmer of hope when he follows Fräulein Bürstner who is crossing his path. But K. cannot change direction: walking 'straff gestreckt'—stretched between his executioners—his gait is upright but not free. Aschenbach's degradation into a stalker enacts the breakdown of the Western model of masculinity which requires strict boundaries and borders as markers of identity. As he pursues Tadzio through stinking and corrupt Venice with sweat and make-up running down his face, Aschenbach loses precisely the sense of propriety and uprightness that had defined his life and writerly identity. His stalking is matched by Tadzio's walking which performs desire through a self-consciously narcissistic gait that merely mimics innocent naturalness. In this way the new figures of the stalker and the walker as model on the catwalk articulate hitherto illegitimate desires and emotions that destabilise the norms of masculinity. Irmgard Keun's novel situates her protagonist's *flânerie* in the context of the political and economic turmoil of the late Weimar Republic. Doris's pursuit of glamour in the metropolis ends with her walking the streets as a homeless young woman along with countless hungry prostitutes and other outcasts. In the passage quoted above her walking transmutes into a mode of stagnation between a threatening future and an undesirable past. The very real threat of Doris's social degradation at the end of the novel thus marks *flânerie* as a bourgeois project that requires leisure and economic security.

The modernist literary texts discussed in my paper were published between 1913 and 1932: that is, at a time when the philosophically and morally inspired walkers of the 18th and 19th centuries had learned to practise a very different gait, that of the marching armies of the First World War. The loss of a whole generation of young men who were marched to their deaths in France, Belgium or at the eastern fronts changed the discourse on walking: with soldiers returning from the war crippled and traumatised, stepping forward into the future became a precarious, if not impossible, task. Dix's poignant image of the match seller with stumps and Keun's figure of the blind war veteran who can no longer orient himself in the city cast doubt on man's ability to cultivate the good gait under the conditions of modernity. In the early 20th century, walking re-emerges as a figure of ambivalence that captures the disconcerting experience of a modernity which, besides unleashing titillating thrills, came with fatal threats. Rather than epitomising man's unstoppable passage towards a state of enlightened freedom, the male walkers in my texts are goal oriented but not free—they need to be *gegängelt* like children, they are entrapped in repetitive circular movement, they stumble and disintegrate in the pursuit of unacknowledged desire. And yet, the example of the two female figures seems to point to an alternative trajectory. To the very end Doris furnishes the reader with her 'socially perceptive, emotionally subtle, touching and distressing'⁴³ impressions as she is roaming the city in pursuit of a better life. Unlike the male protagonists whose impaired gait leads to ruination, Doris has not entirely lost the spring in her step: she decides to set off to find her old mate Karl, a socialist who lives in a garden colony. Likewise in Kafka's *The Trial* the brief appearance of Fräulein Bürstner at the end of the novel stands for a rare moment of utopian hope precisely because her pathway leads to a different future from Josef K.'s. In Kafka's universe Fräulein Bürstner is perhaps the most positive figure: she embodies the aspirations of the New Woman by holding down a job and going out at night unescorted by men. As Deborah Parsons has shown with reference to English literature, the modern flâneuse 'counter(s) women's historical exclusion from the city' as a space of observation and interaction.⁴⁴ Perhaps these female figures can embody the art of pleasurable walking precisely because they have abandoned the burden of the good gait.

⁴³Boa (2009: 353–54).

⁴⁴Deborah L. Parsons (2000: 15, 215).

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