

PLEASURE OF WALKING

JAMES HILLMAN

The Garden of Eden was created by a walking God. There is walking in Paradise and also there is Paradise in walking.

"Only ideas won by walking have any value."
— Friedrich Nietzsche

FROM ARCHAIC TIMES through antiquity and the Renaissance and right into the early twentieth century, basic human postures — lying, sitting, standing and running — have remained the same. Body movements, such as bending, reaching, holding, leaning and dancing, more or less go on through the ages, differently, but with continuity. Today we may sit more and stand less, or sit more than squat, and kneel. But basic human movements have changed radically only in walking. We not only walk less than did our ancestors, we have almost eliminated the need to walk. It has become obsolete. Locomotion has become mechanized, from remote-control devices to, of course, automobiles.

Automobiles do more than locomote us. Dutch psychologist Bernd Jager has observed the differences in facial expressions in the newer western and southern cities of the USA, which depend on cars, and the older northern and eastern cities, where there is still jostling in the streets, subways, buses, and pavements. Jager concludes that the more uniform, bland ad-like faces of people in the Sun Belt result from the increased use of the automobile, and the fact that one does not need "to prepare a face to meet the faces that we meet," as T. S. Eliot says. Our face belongs to others as well as to ourselves, and results from others. How we countenance others, engage them with our expression, open up or close ourselves off — all this shows in the face.

As humans become faceless under their blown-dry hair and cosmetics,



ILLUSTRATION: AXEL SCHEFFLER

cars pick up more distinctive names and fronts, those personalized expressions by which even small children can at once discern the make and model. But the face of the driver within the car is generally vacant, glazed behind the windshield. Strapped in, door locked, listening to a tape, staring ahead, passively registering motions of objects out there or subjective emotions in here, worries and desires, it is not an interpersonal face, but an isolated face — its expression does not matter.

The face of the city block, bazaar, market and alley is wily, vivid, canny, and as expressive as the gestures and language of those engaged from morning till night with other people.

So, the absence of meeting faces by walking among the crowd absents us from our own faces; it also absents us from the city as it was originally imagined: a congregating crowd of human faces from all "walks" of life.

Views from designers' boards and developers' plans rarely show a crowd. Instead, couples stroll under

trees, persons emerge one at a time from cars under canopies. It is as if there were a polyphobia, a fear of the many, facing and being faced by others. I believe that the fear of violence in city streets correlates psychologically with the sense of oneself as a depersonalized, defaced object — a sitting duck or victim — placed in an empty abstract street like a little figure in a designer's plan.

I have found in my psychological work with people that during periods of acute psychological turmoil, walking is an activity to which one naturally turns. This was of course in Zürich, Switzerland, where I practised for some twenty-five years before coming to Dallas. Walking doesn't come as easily in a North Dallas suburb. In Irving or Plano, a person walking up the street stands out more oddly, more suspiciously, than does a winded jogger in red warm-up suit, yellow-striped shoes, and earmuffs. Walking can be meditative therapy — not an idyllic hike by the ocean — but simply around the city for hours in early morning or late at night. Can our city allow this psychological self-cure? Or would we become prowlers or victims in the eyes of our fellows?

WALKING CALMS TURMOIL. Prisoners circumbulate the yard, animals exercise back and forth in their cages, the anxious pace the floor — waiting for the baby to be born or to hear news from the board-room. Heidegger recommended the path through the woods for philosophizing; Aristotle's school was called "Peripatetic" — thinking and discoursing while walking up and down; monks walk round their closed gardens. Nietzsche said that only thoughts while walking, *laufenden* thoughts, were of value —

thoughts that ran, not sitting thoughts.

One goes for a walk to get the stuck, depressed state of mind or its whirling agitations into an organic rhythm, and this organic rhythm of walking takes on symbolic significance as we place one foot after the other, left-right, left-right, in a balanced pace. Pace. Measure. Taking steps. With the soul-calming language of walking, the dartings of the mind begin to form into a direction. As we walk, we are in the world, finding ourselves in a particular space and turning that space by walking within it into a place, a dwelling or territory, a local habitation with a name. The mind becomes contained in its rhythm. If we cannot walk, where will the mind go? Will it not run wild, or stay stuck, only to be moved by the rhythms of pharmaceuticals: uppers and downers, slowers and speeders, calmers and peppers? Is not a city that offers no walking also a city that offers no dwelling for the mind? Simply said: We may be driving, literally *driving*, ourselves crazy by not attending to the fundamental human need of walking.

Two centuries ago there was a good deal of walking in Europe, especially in and around gardens. The art of garden-making reached an apogee. We can learn something from those gardeners. They were the great developers of that time: whole prospects were raised or levelled, streams diverted, vistas opened, mazes constructed. Those developers then were moved by aesthetic considerations, ours now by economic ones. What they left behind became national treasures for the community; what ours are leaving behind result in personal wealth for individuals.

In the art of the garden, it was considered essential that both the eye and the foot be satisfied: the eye to see, the foot to travel through; the eye to encompass the whole and know it, the foot to remain within it and experience it. It was equally essential in this "aesthetics of dissociation", as Robert Dupree describes it, that the eye and the foot *not* travel the same path. The poet William Shenstone writes that when a building or other object has once been viewed, the foot should *never* travel to it by the same path which the eye has travelled over before. Further,

says Shenstone, the worst design is one that creates a "strait-lined avenue where the foot is to travel over what the eye has done before . . . to move on continually and find no change of scene attendant on our change of place, must give actual pain to a person of taste."

OUR LANDSCAPES IN Dallas — the malls, streets, building complexes — seem built for the eye only. The foot is forced to travel over what the eye has done before, so that walking becomes indeed a pain. In Shenstone's scheme, walking is a mode of discovering new prospects. Walking in our layouts is merely a slow and inefficient way of moving us nearer to what the eye has already seen. The foot is slave to the eye, which makes walking boring, a matter of covering distance. When we can maintain the tension between foot and eye, we embark on a more circular, indirect approach. Foot leads eye, eye instructs foot, alternatingly. Walking takes on the movement of soul because, as the great philosopher Plotinus said, the soul's motion is not direct.

Clearly, the automobile seems a further development of eye-consciousness — rather than foot-consciousness. Despite an old word for the car, "locomobile", its locomotion is a visual experience. Hence, walking on a highway because the car broke down is a horrifying, depersonalizing experience. Out there is revealed to the foot as burrs, weeds, holes, trash, and roaring leviathans at one's back. Of course, new cities have pavement problems since the foot is ignored. The streets soon become criminal regions: roll up the window, lock the door, don't linger. Street crime begins psychologically in a walkless world; it begins on the drawing-board of that planner who sees cities as collections of highrise buildings and convenience malls, with streets as mere efficient modes of access.

Development-planners have radically affected our notions of cities, leading us to forget that cities spring up from below; they rise from their streets. Cities are streets, avenues of commerce and exchange, the low-country world of physical thronging, a congregation pounding the pavements in curiosity, surprise and encounter, human life not above the melee but right in it. Cities depend

on walking for their vitality.

WHAT CAN WE DO? May a psychologist question proposals for malls without foot-imagination, and may he raise doubts about underground tunnels for pedestrians, or recommend interesting downtown pavements rather than glassed-in walkways? May he propose things that are noticeable to the eye and yet draw the foot into exploration — like complexities, nooks, water courses, levels, shifts of perspectives? Yes, I suppose the psychologist would build ha-has in the paths of progress, wanting every design for a street project to be imagined not only in terms of getting there, but also in terms of being there.

I am not beating the antique drum of romance: a stroll under street lamps and leafy sycamores, across clean-swept pavements towards the ice-cream parlour where there is always an empty table; balloon men, vendors . . .

Rather, I am urging what the city itself has always urged by its very name — crowds walking in the streets, the city as a place of soul because it allows our souls their legs, our heads their faces, and our bodies their animal styles. In all things we think of for the future of our city, let us keep our city on its feet. We dwell not only in rooms behind doors, in chairs at tables, at jobs behind counters. We dwell on Earth also in the freedom of the legs that give freedom to the mind.

In the temples once we were blessed for our "coming in and going forth". The blessing took into account the human as a moving being, a soul with feet, a physical being in the midst of a physical world made to walk in, as Adam and Eve walked in Eden. That garden is the imagination's primordial place of the nostalgia which recurs unconsciously in all utopian dreams. And that garden was created, you will remember, by a walking God. That image says, there is walking in Paradise; it also says, there is Paradise in walking. ●

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