

A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF WALKING: FOOTPATHS AND FLIGHT WAYS

PERRY ZURN
American University

It is hardly difficult to imagine writing about critical phenomenology and walking. One might pause over the method of critical phenomenology as a *meta-odos*, a thinking of the path. Or consider the steps critical phenomenology takes and the unique pitch of its gait as it traverses the borderlands between phenomenology and critical theory. One might query how these two have the capacity to walk so well side by side, so much so that they can become as one, barely distinguishable against an open sky. Such an inquiry would no doubt track how it is that phenomenology walks toward things, through things, into things, suspending the eye of the natural attitude and proceeding ever so carefully and yet bluntly in search of what springs toward it. But such an inquiry would also track how that very process is a scripted processual, notwithstanding all the suspensions upon which it steps. Who and what writes and rewrites the script of what appears, when, and how? What inscriptions define appearances in advance and diaeretically cut them clean from one another? And what are the unscripted forces still at work? Ferreting out the work of scripts and inscriptions, such an inquiry would pause over the hidden structures that constrict what might feel like a free flight of the mind, a bit of unfettered rambling in the fields of consciousness. Thinking critical phenomenology as walking, then, means tracking the two moving in tandem. Phenomenology pulls toward the horizon of experience, while critical theory veers toward structural analyses. Together, they tread a uniquely illuminating path.

But musing over this conjunction of critical phenomenology and walking, the very structure and function of this jointure, is not my aim in the present inquiry. Rather, I aim to explore a critical phenomenology *of* walking. The path I take, then, is a different one. It necessarily begins by attending to this ordinary, overly familiar act of walking and making it strange, peeling away the shroud by which it appears a foregone fact and banal practice. I want to ask, what is it to walk? What does it look like, feel like, sound like? For whom, in what time and place, is it so? How is walking experienced subjectively and intersubjectively, insofar as we walk before, behind, and beside one another? I want to attune myself to the way we walk *in a world*, or to the worldedness of our walking. What are the social values and structures that inform and give form to who walks, where and how they walk? How is it that our walk

differs depending on the “we” who walks? But also, how is walking itself a worlding? Why and how does walking have the power to change the social values and structures that impinge upon it, shaping pathways and lifeways as it goes? Embedded in this inquiry is a space for critical phenomenology’s ameliorative project, its capacity to transform the world it takes as its object. In this sense, a critical phenomenology *of* walking opens up a pathway for thinking about walking differently, in more liberatory ways. And it points back to that companion project for another day: rethinking (critical, phenomenological) thought as a kind of walking.

In what follows, then, I sketch the contours of a critical phenomenology of walking. I begin by briefly characterizing the critical phenomenological project and marking some of its invitations to think method and movement alongside one another. Then, I explore two modes of doing a critical phenomenology of walking: attending to *how* one walks and *when and where* one walks. I revisit and reread, in particular, the stories of Charlie Howard and Latisha King, whose walks not only signaled a unique comportment in the world, but a comportment so offensive as to be extinguished by a fatal admixture of homophobia, transphobia, and, in King’s case, racism. Finally, I close by considering the conditions under which a critical phenomenology of walking can be ameliorative—that is, how it can participate in liberatory projects of thinking and making. Drawing on Michel de Certeau and María Lugones, I argue not only that a critical phenomenology of walking can diagnose how structures of oppression constrain walking chances in the world, but also that it can witness how walking critiques those very structures.¹ Walking can be a movement of resistance and reimagination against the constraints of embodiment and subjectivity so singularly inherited and enforced. Traversing the space of this inquiry, I aim to complexify my understanding of walking as a practice, but also to deepen my appreciation of critical phenomenology as a method.

I. THE PATH OF CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Work in phenomenology has recently taken a critical turn; critical phenomenology is coming into its own. And for good reason. Phenomenology and critical theory each, in their own way, walk too quickly past whole realms of things that have a clear bearing on their interests and inquiries. Phenomenology insists on the insight of first-person experience. Focusing less on what the world is than on how it greets us, phenomenology is able to discern specific contours of relation and experience that are otherwise missed. Critical theory, however, insists on the revelatory character of social structures and institutions. Focusing less on how we feel and experience things than on how we inherit structures of meaning and value before we are even conscious, critical theory is able to identify social forces and power relations that organize our world in advance. Critical phenomenologists see in phenomenology and critical theory necessary companions on the path of inquiry.

¹ By “walking chances,” I mean to invoke and extend the social science concept of “life chances.” If one’s chances to live in certain ways are uniquely constrained by social inequalities, so too are one’s chances to walk.

Rich analyses of social institutions require an account of personal experience, just as personal experience is necessarily informed by those social institutions. When paired together in an exploratory project, more of what is and what might be stands out in relief.

While many scholars have sought to distill phenomenology into an essence, it is, at its heart, a practice. And it is a practice poised against metaphysical idealities and certain scientific abstractions. Phenomenology aims to get at the root of how things are actually experienced and lived. In doing so, it works to understand what appears and what allows it to appear as it does. What is the content and what are the conditions of experience and appearance? As crystallized by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology proceeds by way of two preliminary steps: the *epoché* and the eidetic reduction. The *epoché* is a bracketing of the natural attitude, or the suspension of everyday beliefs and habits that make the world as easily habitable as it is impossible to truly see. Following on its heels, the eidetic reduction focuses on the first-person perception of an object in order to identify the essence (*eidos*) or essential structures of human experience. These steps directly change the terrain of inquiry. In Husserl's words, the phenomenologist must "parenthesize" the "whole pre-discovered world" of thought in order to open up a "phenomenological region," a new "province" and "domain" which lies "in another direction" (1999, 65-7). As such, phenomenology is a refusal of the paths and landscapes heretofore taken, and an insistent possibilizing of new landscapes of inquiry and pathways within them. Traversing those new landscapes requires, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a different "manner and style of thinking," a different "movement" entirely (2002, vii, xxiv). Rather than replicating the spiralized structure of a reflection that only ever returns the inquirer to himself, phenomenological inquiry moves, through "radical reflection" and "wonder" in a starfish pattern, constantly extending the inquirer out into the intersubjectivities and histories by which the phenomenological world is steadily being produced and reproduced (xxiv).²

Much like phenomenology, critical theory is a practice. And it is a practice developed in direct resistance to naturalized habits of both theory and critique. Too often, theory purports to be objective, neutral, and universal, while critique capitalizes on that distance to criticize from the outside. Critical theory, however, insists on thinking from the inside out. As Max Horkheimer argues, all theory is not outside the social but inside, produced by and productive of social relations. Insofar as those relations are consistently unequal, buoyed by class and economic inequities, theory must be practiced *critically*, by "radically question[ing]" the state of things here and now so as to contribute to "the abolition of social injustice" (2002, 234, 241). This project of critical theory is a two-step process: identify the conditions that make something what it is and mark the fault lines that allow it to become something else. For Michel Foucault, critical theory aims "to bring out the conditions of acceptability of a system" but also to "follow the breaking points" of that system (1997, 54). Similarly, for Judith Butler, critical theory aims "to recognize the ways in which the coercive effects of

² Eugen Fink, Husserl's steady walking companion, spoke most eloquently of the necessity of wonder to the phenomenological method.

knowledge are at work in subject-formation itself” but also “to risk one’s very formation as a subject” (2004, 320; cf. Butler 2009). Resisting the habit of theorizing abstractly and judging aloofly, critical theory works to assess the systemic conditions for some things so as to possibilize other things. Such a practice opens up pathways heretofore shrouded, in order to carve out a different conceptual and social space. It highlights this whole new “domain” and “field” of potential, a space of “possible dislocations,” which can only be reached by traveling “the opposite route” which stretches out “in the opposite direction” (Foucault 1997, 60-1). Tramping down these pathways requires a habit of “curiosity” for Foucault (Zurn 2021, 74), not unlike the compulsive questions so distinctive of Butler’s style. Why are things the way they are and how could they be otherwise?

Phenomenology and critical theory, then, arise from a rejection of certain forms of scientific objectivity and universal theory, and a refusal to disavow embeddedness in the world. That is, both reject a kind of theory that does not walk with us. As such, critical theory is always critique *of*, just as phenomenology is phenomenology *of*. Each is intentional, engaged, beholden to the thing upon which it supervenes. It theorizes by *walking with*. Critical phenomenology insists even more acutely on that embeddedness. It grants that power structures shape, condition, and determine experience, just as experience anchors (and resists) those power structures. It is also reflexive and ameliorative. It grapples with the situatedness of the inquirer who commits to change and be changed in the process. For Lisa Guenther, the perceptual world is seen, experienced, made and remade through patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and ableism (2019, 11; cf. Guenther 2013, xiii-xv). For this reason, the critical phenomenologist must “scrutinize,” to use Audre Lorde’s term (2013, 36, 41), both the patterns “that we see” and those “according to which we see” (Guenther 2019, 16). For Gayle Salamon, critical phenomenology’s attention to “power” is just as important as its “reflexivity” (2018a, 14, 12), which she characterizes as the perceptual openness through which one necessarily “loses” oneself in the very process of situating oneself (2018b, 18). In this sense, the method doubles down on the tactic of scrutiny. If to scrutinize is to root through the trash (Latin, *scruta*), the critical phenomenologist roots through the waste of power structures while recognizing that they themselves are waste-born and waste-bred. Theorizing does not arise from a pure place; we are always complicit and contaminated, but also creative and generative, reclaiming meaning in the rubble and life from and in detritus.

Critical phenomenology is a way of walking. It is a way of walking that tries to correct for the missteps of traditional theory and classical phenomenology (Salamon 2018a, 16). No doubt about it. But what I am trying to think, here, is a critical phenomenology *of* walking. So let me follow that thread, with its own steps and missteps. Critical phenomenology promises to correct for real limitations in the walking literature to date, which typically foregrounds a relatively disembodied, depoliticized account of walking.³ Even nascent contributions to a critical phenomenology of walking already signal the inadequacies of

³ As exemplary of this depoliticized account, see Gros (2014). As a paradigmatic critique of this account, see Springgay and Truman (2019).

such an approach. While implicitly remarking upon those limitations, my aim here, in the spirit of critical phenomenologists themselves, is to turn the missteps into *mit*-steps of the *Mit-sein*.⁴ To theorize walking between beings and within worlds. And to rebalance our methods, our thought tracks, so as to walk more closely in step with the human and non-human beings with and within whom we are worlded.

And I hardly need an excuse. Historically, both phenomenologists and critical theorists have also been walkers, and some have even written substantively about walking. Take Edmund Husserl, for example. Several times a week, and often accompanied by Eugene Fink, he would walk Lorettoberg, a mountain range just south-west of Freiburg. While walking, he would typically “hold forth on whatever problems were uppermost in his mind,” as if exploratory thoughts were best subtended by exploratory feet (Cairns 1973, 8). *Solvitur ambulando*.⁵ Martin Heidegger, too, walked regularly around Marburg, as well as deep in the Black Forest. There he learned to attend to the contours of a landscape and to what they disclose. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that he characterizes thinking as a path: “Everything here is the path of a responding that examines as it listens” (2013, 184; cf. Lack 2014, 61-62). Like phenomenology, walking, too, is a way of moving in the world, *a way of responding that examines as it listens*. In so moving and so listening, it must necessarily attend not only to present shapes, but also to histories. And it must do more than listen. Walking is also a keenly tuned doing, even a form of protest. In formalizing the figure of the *flâneur*, critical theorist and walker in exile Walter Benjamin asserts that the errant wandering of the *flâneur* constitutes a “protest against [...] production” (2002, 338). And it is precisely in that protest movement that the *flâneur* is capable of another kind of thinking; the *flâneur* “botaniz[es] on the asphalt,” lifting the veil of late capitalism by attending to life as lived (372). And yet that protest is also productive—productive of another sort of living and a different economy of gait and gesture, meaning and mattering. As Michel de Certeau argues, walking resists and repatriates the rules of urban architecture and government, deploying the turn of the body as a turn of phrase, and thereby torquing normative scripts as it goes (1984, 91-110). It is to this nascent tradition of phenomenologists and critical theorists walking—and thinking walking—that I aim to contribute.

II. THE HOW OF WALKING

Critical phenomenology attends to the *how* of walking. How is it that walking feels and functions? How is it experienced by the walker and, correlatively, by the onlooker? How is it that walking appears, or enters the horizon of consciousness, and how does it appear differently depending on the structural constraints and histories of those horizons? How

⁴ “*Mit*” is a German preposition meaning “with,” but also “by, at, through, in, and including.” *Mit-sein*, or being-with, is a phenomenological term that insists human existence is always companionate rather than independent. In speaking of the *mit*-steps of the *Mit-sein*, I aim to summon the thought of being as walking-with.

⁵ *Solvitur ambulando* is a classic Latin phrase meaning “it is solved by walking.”

are experiences of walking differentially distributed across social positions, within networks irrevocably shaped by patriarchal and colonial histories? Indeed, how do sexism, racism, and ableism inform both the gait and its greeting? How do structures determine phenomena? And how might those structures be resisted, even changed? In asking simply “How is it that we walk?”, critical phenomenology attends and it listens, it botanizes and it turns.

Judith Butler makes a nascent contribution to a critical phenomenology of walking when they recall the story of Charlie Howard, a white gay man of 23 who was killed in Bangor, Maine, in 1984.⁶ As Butler (2006) tells it, his walk was a phenomenon unto itself, one fatally offensive to a homophobic society.

He walks with what we would call a swish, a kind of, his hips move back and forth in a feminine way. And as he grew older that swish, that walk, became more pronounced, and it was more dramatically feminine. He started to be harassed by the boys in the town, and soon two or three boys stopped his walk and they fought with him and they ended up throwing him over a bridge and they killed him. So then we have to ask: why would someone be killed for the way they walk? Why would that walk be so upsetting to those other boys that they would feel that they must negate this person, they must expunge the trace of this person. They must stop that walk no matter what. They must eradicate the possibility of that person ever walking again.

Often adorned in earrings, eye makeup, and a purse, Howard sank into the roll of his own hips more heavily as he embraced his queer gender and sexuality (Armstrong 1994; cf. Anonymous 2009). There was “a little bit of a ‘fuck you’ in the walk,” Butler observes, a bit of “girling himself in the street,” as he fiercely—and fabulously—refused cisheterosexual constraints (2009, 204-05). His walk was a form of embodiment that built belonging, with himself and those he came to love. He rolled the square, circled the box. He took license. And the lived experience, the felt phenomena of that license was like beginning to breathe, like catching his breath. And yet, coming to breathe in a world marked by compulsory cisheterosexuality can sometimes feel like walking in quicksand; your limbs are swallowed up and your breath is gulped away.

Although unremarked by Butler, Howard had asthma. Asthma is a medical condition in which a person’s airways become inflamed, constrict, fill with mucus, and spasm. When Howard was attacked on the street by three young men (one a hockey player, another football), that asthma was triggered by his repeated attempts to run from them and to endure the beating he eventually sustained. As indicated by a subsequent autopsy, Howard died from “asphyxiation” exacerbated by an attack of “acute bronchial asthma” (Armstrong 1994, 312). It is twice, then, that he could not breathe; he drowned from fluids inside and out. And it is twice that he could not walk; asthma buckled his knees before the river

⁶ Of the three times (to my knowledge) Judith Butler refers to this story, they do not mention the name Charlie Howard, nor do they always recall the story’s elements accurately. The story seems to have become for them an oral history, a touchstone for thinking the queer walk and its fate. See Butler (1989, 256); Butler (2006); Butler and Taylor (2009, 204-5).

stopped his feet.⁷ It is important to pause here and appreciate the chiasmic structure of breath in this scene. Healthy, non-asthmatic lungs expand with exertion to metabolize up to twenty times more oxygen than they do in a resting state (Burton, Stokes, and Hall 2004, 186). As Howard was increasingly unable to breathe, his attackers—landing fists and kicks, and hoisting him over a bridge—took deeper, richer breaths. If this is not the structure of homophobia—and racism, and ableism—what is? One cannot think this chiasm today without hearing the belabored breathing of Eric Garner and George Floyd.⁸ Elizabeth Bishop, another queer asthmatic, writes of this unbearable dissymmetry in her 1955 poem “O Breath” (2008; cf. Lombardi 1992). While the world moves “almost intolerably” in the free bluster of her lover’s breath, Bishop herself is crushed by weight of the closet; she can barely squeak out a livable life “beneath / within / if never with” (77). It is a testament to the rigidity of this chiasmic structure that Howard’s growing freedoms of gender and sexuality constituted such a dramatic offense. As he moved to breathe more deeply and walk more fluidly, a vise clamped around his throat and 600 pounds of river closed over his head.

In her self-styled contribution to a critical phenomenology of walking, Gayle Salamon focuses on a different structure and a different case. Offering an account of transphobia in *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, Salamon (2018a) characterizes the damning logic by which a trans walk can precipitate a transphobic murder.⁹ King was a Black-identifying, mixed-race trans girl who was shot to death by a classmate, Brandon McInerney, in Oxnard, California, in 2008.¹⁰ She was fifteen years old. During the trial, King’s flagrantly free walk was trotted out not only as the trigger for her murder, but as a synecdoche for her gender and sexuality. Salamon patiently unpacks the how. How is it that King’s walk was felt, how did it fall, how did it function? How is it that her walk came to signify King’s offense, the sign of her transgression? And ultimately, how is it that transphobia constrained her walking chances in advance?

Salamon grants, fundamentally, that “[a] walk is an elaborate and complex expression of embodied life” (2018b, 51). For King, it came with ease and glee. She proudly waltzed through the school with an outsized fierceness and flamboyance that refused to be reduced to a mere “parading” or “sashaying” (86). In commanding her brown suede high-heeled boots, King became noticeably happier, as if, through the surety of her feet, she found an uncertain home (Cunningham 2013). And yet, as Salamon states, “Her walk was a break with, and in, typicality itself,” the typicality crafted by compulsory cisheterosexuality (2018b, 66). After all, it is only in contrast to rectilinear angles and rigorous gestural scripts that the stylistic skew of a queer walk can be measured. While that break was freeing for

⁷ As Lucy, a 7-year-old asthmatic, reports: “Sometimes when I get up, I start falling down because I can’t walk that much because I can’t breathe.” See Lucy (2021).

⁸ I use the term “chiasm” here in the rhetorical, rather than strictly Merleau-Pontian, sense.

⁹ In *Solitary Confinement*, Guenther (2013) notes the intersubjective costs of being made to walk on “neatly plotted sidewalks” (162) in abstraction from grass and stars; if walking creates social and interpersonal depth, its diminution likewise weakens bonds of the shared world (178).

¹⁰ Both King and Charlie Howard had recorded learning disabilities. How much the “behavioral problems” of their queer genders and sexualities played in their diagnoses and treatment plans has yet to be fully established. See Zurn (2019).

King, it was infuriating for most. Her walk was perceived by fellow classmates, teachers, and professionals as “an act, and often as an aggressive act, akin to a sexual advance or even a sexual assault” (30). When her walk was in full swing, she was perceived to be “throwing it at people,” provoking and even justifying violence (34). It wasn’t so much the lip gloss, the scarf, or the green prom dress, but the high-heeled boots; it wasn’t so much the pucker of her lips, the lilt in her fingers, but the swish of her gait. This is what made her “disgusting,” McInerney states (59). It was the slant, the tilt of her body, and the shock of her heels on the floor (51-52, 66-80). Within a critical phenomenological analysis, King’s walk is something experienced as subjectively as it is intersubjectively. Walks happen within a body, yes, but also between bodies. And that betweenness is structured in advanced by social discourses and institutions, themselves informed by ever longer histories.

How, then, do we walk? Critical phenomenology attends to the how of the body, and to the how of the body between bodies. How is walking, like breathing, a deeply embodied, rhythmic engagement with the world? And how is walking, not unlike breathing, already experienced within norms of embodiment, norms of gender and sexuality, race, class, and ability, as belonging to or breaking social codes and as therefore making room to breathe or refusing the right to breathe? These are the difficult, entangled and entangling questions with which a critical phenomenologist is captivated. Attending to the mundane arts of walking, the critical phenomenologist attends to the lived and limbed experience of walking that floats submerged beneath everyday life, but also to the shockwaves by which certain walks pierce that fabric and become objects of explicit attention, whether of appreciation, observation, disdain, or persecution. In considering the anonymity that so often blankets the quotidian, Erwin Straus once wrote: “A healthy person does not ponder about breathing, seeing, walking. Infirmities of breath, sight, or gait startle us” (1973, 232). But health is not the only invisibilizer, nor illness the sole arbiter of shock. Homophobia, racism, and ableism, among other structures, do the work of abnormalizing, of calling out and putting down. Each participates, as Sunaura Taylor puts it, in the ever-expanding eugenic impulse that asserts, “This human doesn’t count enough as a human to be allowed to breathe” (Butler and Taylor 2009, 206). This human doesn’t count enough as a human to be allowed to walk. In the struggle to breathe and in the struggle to walk, then, lies a fundamental truth, one built in the body just as much as between bodies. And it is to this that critical phenomenologists attend.

III. THE WHEN AND THE WHERE OF WALKING

While critical phenomenology necessarily attends to the *how* of walking, it must also attend to the *when* and the *where* of walking. When does walking break into my consciousness and when does it recede into the background? Where am I when my walking sleeps in a blanket of anonymity and when does it leap forward, insistently crowding out other physical and social perceptions? How does the when of my existence (my history) and the where of my existence (my geography) impact the significance and signification of my walk? How do my when and where inform the style of my walk and the stylization others make of my walk?

Is it in the office, on the street, in the country or the city, is it at rush hour or at dawn? How does it modulate across this border or that, this crowd and context or that? How have historical and geographical legacies become sedimented in normalized gestures such that what stands out differs as though by dialect? And when and where can these sedimentations be resisted, even changed? In asking “When and where is it that we walk?” critical phenomenology attends still more deeply.

It is important to fully appreciate the differential distribution of walking chances across time and place. And the method of critical phenomenology grants as much. Phenomenology is rooted; critical theory is placed. Merleau-Ponty recognized the embodied constitution of objects by “walking around” his flat, while Foucault diagnosed disciplinary power by linking the eighteenth-century French soldier’s “walk [*marcher*]” to the rhythms of French incarceration during the same period (2002, 235-6; Foucault 1976, 151-2). The importance of place and time has not gone unappreciated in walking literature, especially within narratives of walkers who walk the thin lines of social belonging. George Yancy (2013), for example, in his ruminations on “walking while Black,” recalls being profiled as a young boy, walking the streets of North Philadelphia in the late 1970s, with a telescope under his arm. Erica Violet Lee (2016) reflects upon the difference between walking as an Indigenous woman in downtown Saskatchewan and on the prairies themselves. Sunaura Taylor remarks upon the pleasures of walking in her wheelchair in San Francisco, where a certain level of access is normalized (Butler and Taylor 2009, 189). Even Charlie Howard was free to walk as he liked in the Unitarian Universalist Church, but not down State Street, in rural Bangor, Maine, in the early 1980s. It is, indeed, this specific temporal and geographical confluence that made linking arms with his friend Roy Ogden so dangerous. Many a queer knows the feeling: the simultaneous rush of relief and risk through one’s body, all senses heightened, an inner relaxation swaddled in full-body tension, the cradled hand soft but the shoulders hard, the feet ready to swerve, the eyes laughing and searching all at once. Time and place matter.

Sara Ahmed tells the story of being stopped by the police in a “leafy suburb” of Adelaide, Australia, in the early 1970’s (1998, 115). She was fourteen and walking without shoes. They read her as a poor, Aboriginal girl who might have been responsible for “some break-ins in the area recently.” Her brown skin placed her as out of place. Her bare feet pronounced her walk as illegitimate. After she denied being Aboriginal, but refused to explain her brown skin, they winked at her and asked if it was just “a sun tan.” She insisted on her right to walk, to walk without shoes, to walk where she pleased; she dropped the name of her private girl’s school and willed herself to be read as white. They let her go with a warning. When she returned home, her sister said she needed to lose weight so she wouldn’t get mistaken, again, as Aboriginal. The scene ends in tears. Ahmed carefully unravels this story, waiting patiently beside each thread—gender, sexuality, race, class, body size—and thinking carefully through the braid of complicity and resistance, of her smiles and her refusals. Her walk could only pierce the sheen of everyday life as it did under certain circumstances: in a time and a place where police intervention and racial profiling are routine; in a time and a place where Indigenous people are socially present, geographically segregated, and historically criminalized; and in a time and a place where Ahmed’s own

mixed South Asian heritage was unreadable, unthinkable. It is in this context that she was perceived as an outsider, a thief on the run. Insofar as her walk was perceived as a threat, she was always already walking under threat. How this happens, and how this feels, are temporally and locationally contingent.

Attending to the when and where certainly invites us to think more critically, but it also opens up new phenomenological possibilities. Let us return to Latisha King for a moment, and the significance of her walk in different locales. Place is important. King's walk became salient at school in multiple contexts, whether she walked down the hallway and into the classroom, walked onto the basketball court, ran around at recess, or traipsed in and out of the principal's office.¹¹ And it continued to be salient in the court room in Chatsworth, LA, where it was repeatedly reprised and replayed. While Salamon makes much of these locations to *place* her phenomenological analyses, attention should also be turned to the town of Oxnard itself.¹² Oxnard is a long-segregated town, with significant Mexican, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino populations (Maulhardt 2005; Garcia 2018; Barajas 2012). Walking as a Black trans girl in a predominantly Latinx school, with majority white teachers, King's walk was inescapably enmeshed in the local policing of race and ethnicity—woven across gender, class, religion, and ability. But King also walked in the town of Oxnard some fifty years after Lucy Hicks Anderson, one of the earliest recorded Black trans women in the US (Snorton 2018, 145-51). And this invites a critical, phenomenological turn. What is it for a dehistoricized trans life, only ever conceptualized as one at a time, to belong to a lineage? What is it for a trans walk to belong to a lineage of other trans walks? Did Latisha know? Who would have told her? How might the fact of Anderson's existence have enlivened her limbs, put a spring in her step, changed how her walk felt and functioned in the intersubjective spaces of school and shelter, friends and phobias? What is it when a trans walk is clocked because the onlooker has seen a trans walk before? And what is it for a trans person to learn to walk again? What rebalancing, rerooting, liting and tilting, grounding and squaring occur as we look to one another and our ancestors to breathe new life into our embodied selves bodying forth?

But there is still greater, richer context for King's walk across Oxnard's history. As a place in time, Oxnard invites us to think about the critical conditions and first-person experiences of *walking away* and *walking back*, *walking out* and *walking in*. Early in 1942, hundreds of Japanese Americans from in and around Oxnard were forced to relocate to internment camps across the United States. This forced *walking away*, however, was answered by a chosen *walking back*. Several years later, most of them returned (Maulhardt 2005). Well before and after these internment policies, however, Oxnard was a place of labor organizing. From the Japanese/Mexican strike of 1903 to the citrus strike of 1940 and the Chavez-led labor strikes of 1970, in which “thousands of defiant workers walked off their jobs,” Oxnard has been a place of *walking out*—walking out of factories, out of fields, out of frames. But it has also been a place of *walking in* (Daniel 1995, 393; Barajas 2012; Almaguer 1995). From

¹¹ King could walk as she pleased at the children's shelter Casa Pacifica, but not walk onto the basketball court, “a sacred space for masculinity,” to state her queer desire for McInerney. See Corbett (2017, 164).

¹² Andrea Pitts (2021) begins this work in their commentary on *The Life and Death of Latisha King*.

labor unions to Occupy Oxnard, there is a long history of walking into the room, walking into the assembly, walking into the facility, the administrative building, or the gates, to get things done, make things different, and claim voice. Did Latisha King not also walk in protest? Did she ever walk out, walk away? Whatever the answer to these questions, it is certain that King protested by *walking back* and *walking in*, to the bullies, to the school, to the transphobic teachers, and to her friends. Commentators appreciate the relentlessness of the slurs thrown at her, but perhaps not the relentlessness of her own returns. Indeed, the embodied sense of walking *back to* and *back in* deserves deeper consideration. So much of our framework for walking is forward leaning, pressing down the path, toward the next turn and on to the next horizon. What can we appreciate when we turn that ‘round? To what lost phenomenologies of walking are we therewith invited when we hover at the back of walking, in walking back?

To think walking from a critical phenomenological perspective, we must not think only of the how, but also of the when and the where. Too often, walking is not thought, but simply done. And too often still, when walking is thought, it is thought as the activity of a universal subject, whether in the service of utilitarian ends or ruddy freedom. The how pushes us beneath a simplistic who and what and why, demanding a more finely grained analysis of the form walking takes and the formations it sustains. Pushing still deeper, the when and the where locate those forms and formations, anchoring them to habits and horizons as much as to institutions and inscriptions. Here lie the questions that form the trails and gullies of a critical phenomenology of walking. And those questions aim not to settle, but to unsettle, and to unsettle consistently, as a practice, a path of thinking, a way of responding that examines as it listens.

IV. THE POWER OF WALKING

There can be a certain tendency toward passivity in a critical phenomenology, as a description of first-person experiences constrained in advance by social structures, institutions, and histories—as if things are experienced this way because things are made to be experienced this way. Full stop. But there is a necessary activity embedded in the critical tradition, and it is imperative that this element not be lost in the critical phenomenological enterprise. This is the root of critical phenomenology’s ameliorative potential. Critical phenomenology can facilitate liberation insofar as it is a way of thinking, or of moving in conceptual space, that attends to the differences of first-person, intersubjective experiences and the sedimentations of structural investments. Thinking those differences and those sedimentations provides not only a way *to diagnose* the present but also *to possibilize* a different future. To assess constructions of habit and inscription, as much as to find ways out from under them. While that analytical work is important, I want to propose a third sense in which critical phenomenology can be ameliorative and that is in its capacity *to witness*. The critical phenomenological project is a way of moving in the world *and* a way of listening to how the world moves. It has the capacity not simply to condition future ameliorative work but to witness ameliorative work already in play. And walking is a case in point.

One of the purchases of a critical phenomenology of walking is its capacity not only to diagnose the histories and institutions that police the place and performance of walking, but to thickly describe the ways in which that policing is differentially distributed and experienced based on the gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, and disability status of the one who walks. It matters who walks, how they walk, when and where. And, if the testaments of Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Charlie Howard, Latisha King, Erica Violet Lee, Sunaura Taylor, and George Yancy are any indication, understanding how walking appears and how it functions is a critical component of the project of social liberation. But critical phenomenology does not only attend to the fact of walking, or to the feelings of and the forces that impinge on the gait (and how they might be thought and done otherwise). It also attends to the forces generated by that gait. Walking as actant. But also: a specific sort of walking as a specific sort of actant. Walkers from marginalized groups are not simply victims of oppression and sustainers of harm in the delimitation of their walks; they are also revolutionaries, rewriters of history in the very pitch of their gait. They reconfigure space, rearrange horizons, and fracture constraints. Critical phenomenology has the honor of bearing witness to walking as itself an act of resistance and re-formation.

Michel de Certeau (1984) eloquently insists that walking is an act of resistance. When he thinks about walking, he conceptualizes it in an urban context. Government administrators, city personnel, and urban planners all craft and read the text of a city as it should be, or as it was meant to be. But walkers—rambling down city streets, jaywalking from one side to the other, loitering where they will, taking shortcuts, and building pragmatic paths by the sheer force of their feet—recraft and reread the city as it needs to be, in the very moment of its use. “Footsteps,” de Certeau writes, “give their shape to spaces. They weave places together” (97). Walkers actualize what the city planners planned, and yet differently. Against the projections of the city, walkers pitch practice. And against the written text of the city, walking speaks. Much like everyday speech, walking obeys certain rules and abandons others, innovates one moment and turns an indifferent ear the next. “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks’” (99). It triangulates need and desire, curiosity and pragmatism, and transforms paths accordingly. As such, de Certeau insists, there is a “long poem of walking” that lays thickly atop a path’s literal geography (101, 105). Walking enunciates as it wills, in resistant relation to the city’s ought’s and must’s. And it is in this resistant relation that walking cultivates its own style and sense. It cuts a curb like it turns a phrase, relishing in the license one can still take within signal constraints. And it is for this reason that walking, as a practice of everyday life, has an implicit revolutionary power.

To determine the resistant quality of the walk, however, it matters who walks, how, when and where. Walking, as an act of resistance, shapes and reshapes space. And yet, that work of shaping and reshaping supervenes on the walkers in question. In her response to de Certeau and the long tradition of universalizing the walker, María Lugones (2003) insists on the specificity of “streetwalkers.” Streetwalkers (*callejeras*), for Lugones, are at home and at work in the streets, as much as they are unhomed and out of work on the streets. As those who live “at the border, abyss, edge, shore of countersense, of emergent sense,” streetwalkers themselves have “ill-defined ‘edges’” (236, 209). They are multiplicitous subjects coming in

and out of being in deeply intersubjective, interdependent, and intercorporeal relations. Streetwalkers live and move in hangouts (207, 220, 213). In this context, hangouts are not networking conferences or business socials. Streetwalkers hangout by making home and making space in the streets, hanging out where they are not supposed to, with those they are not supposed to, in ways they are not supposed to. And it is in this place of impurity and illegitimacy, and in this very movement of mixing and mottling, that streetwalkers critically remake and retheorize the world (Hoagland 2019). Through “the alert embodiment of walking and bumping, among and into one another,” Lugones writes, streetwalkers generate the “enigmatic vocabularies and gestures” capable of illuminating the “poli-vocal, poli-logical complexity” of their lives (2003, 215, 221, 224). They do this to contest the meaning of the possible, and to create it anew. And this, she insists, is not simply walking. This is a doing and a thinking. This is resistant streetwalker theorizing.

If the footsteps of a normate body give their shape to spaces, certainly the wayfinding of non-normate bodies recontours space in a uniquely resistant way. And critical phenomenology can catch that, the way marginalized bodies walk and bump into one another, reweaving gesture and carriage. Working in the groove Lugones laid, Kim Hall (2021) turns a critical phenomenological eye on their own gait, which they call “a limping swagger or a swaggering limp.” Born with “what has been called a malformed hip joint,” or a shortened acetabulum, Hall went through a range of early corrective surgeries, braces, and physical therapy. In a sense, these were successful: Hall walks. In another sense, they were unsuccessful: Hall walks “with a difference.” There is something not normal, something disorienting about their walk. Strangers ask, “What’s wrong? What happened? What did you do to yourself?” Critical phenomenology—specifically a crip critical phenomenology—can analyze the structures that construct the meaning of ability (and disability) in advance, and that, in so doing, shape bodily habits and possibilities. The very structure of what a body is and what it can do is not born but made. Critical phenomenology can analyze that making, but it can also testify. “Limping-swaggering along,” Hall writes, “I forge a path between disability and ability where I live, forging paths that rework and resist dominant spaces and meanings.” Their queer crip walk undoes, with each step, the ableist and cisheteronormative construction of space, bodies, and their interrelation. It upends the presumption of the universal subject who walks, instead striking out unsteadily, unevenly, with a hint of weakness and non-normative sexuality, into a space that does not expect it. Critical phenomenology can witness that walk; it can catch sight of that resistance.

Critical phenomenology must, in the last instance, attend to the revolutionary character of walking. While walking is, indeed, a horizon of consciousness and a site of oppression, it is also a syntax of resistance. It is not just that Latisha King experiences her walk, or that her walk is experienced by others awash in homophobic and transphobic, racist and ableist frameworks, but that her walk does something in the world, realigning embodiments and rearranging horizons. It does something and it says something. It is a saying, a responding that examines as it listens. And this is how walking comes to matter.

Critical phenomenology is poised to attend with unusual attention not only to the body schema, intercorporeality, and lifeworld of walkers, but also to the socio-political structures and histories that shape them and which they in turn shape. Phenomenology and critical

theory both developed as a kind of thinking that refuses to abstract and consume, but chooses rather to take theoretical steps that are, each and every one of them, a greeting, a welcome, a walking alongside the complexity of the patterns that we see and according to which we see. Together they model a becoming-haptic in the space of thought. In the thought world. Their questions feeling the way. What I have offered here, then, are but a few of the footpaths and flight ways of a critical phenomenology of walking.



“Fag! Dyke! Fuckin Faggot!” A white supped up truck, jammed with three heads, capped much like mine, their bodies no doubt jeaned and booted much like mine. Zoomed past. It was a commercial intersection in the Philly suburbs some years back. I felt wooden and out of joint, extended limbs awkwardly mimicking locomotion. Like my heel hit the street before my femur hit my knee. I felt hot in my face. And like I couldn’t stand up straight. Even as I squared my shoulders, their parts rounded and sunk, as if ducking the next hurling word... or worse. Would they circle back? Did they have friends? Do they know where I live? I kept wanting to look up at every passing car in case. But also not to look at anyone, for fear of the shame of someone having witnessed. Or having seen. I felt a sudden unhomed-ness from the world, as if the sidewalk itself was prying me off to flick me away. I was not alone at the time, but I do not remember who I was with or what they said or did. In that moment, their existence was erased from my scene of perception, not even a blip on the horizon. I tucked down a residential street. I passed the Trump signs and the Quaker retreat center. Windows felt like gaping eyes. Did that just happen? My shoulders, my feet said yes. I stopped walking for a while after that.



There is nothing special about my story. That’s the point. It’s not special. It’s not the first time or the worst time. It’s just there. There in their bodies and here in mine. And yet, this is not simply the story of a particular phenomenological experience of walking, informed by structures of homotransphobia in early twenty-first century East Coast living, for a relatively young white, able-bodied, transmasculine person not dressed to impress. It is also the story of just such a person traversing that intersection, writing that space, walking that story. And walking *out*. Walking in a way that is readable—legible as illegitimate. And walking that way out into the world, where room and space have to be made, possibilities changed and corporealities refigured. Citing Lourdes Ashley Hunter, Susan Stryker (2016; cf. Hunter 2015) states, “Every breath a trans person takes is an act of revolution.” So, too, is every step. “Each breath insists on a new ordering of the world,” Stryker continues; it is “the instrumentalization of a contested necessity of life as a resistant and defiant act of survival.” So, too, is each step. It is a will to move and be moved differently. And to scramble and conspire together for another world. In this sense, it matters that we breathe. It matters that we—the many we’s whose walks are forbidden, hassled, constrained, policed, criminalized, derided, and snuffed out—it matters that we walk.

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