

## Walking in air in Anlhiac

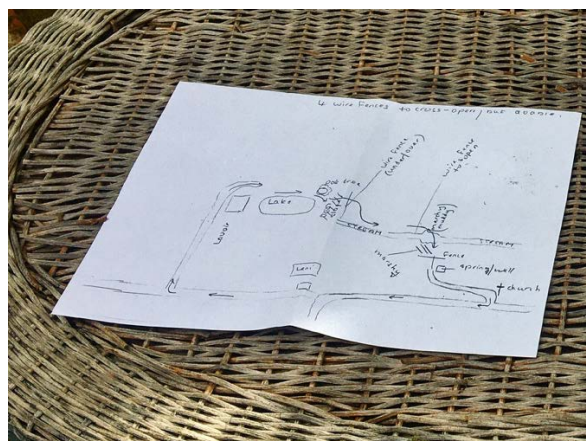
10/09/2022



*On the first weekend of the hunting season, gun shots in the distance, wind in the air and in the poetic fragments we chose as potential prompt / guide / score. In the wind time walk.*

I am sitting, thinking, thinging a bit of stillness of mind and heart, before setting off for some fieldwork in North Dordogne. Most of the others have left already for a two hour long collective walk to the nearby Auvézère river, guided by Leni our host for the day. Antoine is doing a shorter circular loop in the woods, Will has set off on another itinerary involving crossing a stream and four electric fences. I am hesitating between the two possibilities as I consult the maps that Leni has drawn for us. I have in mind Sakaki's words 'in the wind time walks' as a potential path to follow on this windless sunny autumn day. We had a bit of welcomed rain yesterday, first drops in the region for many weeks, hopefully signalling the end of the worst drought for over a century. The air is still, birds are singing gently, enjoying the long-awaited coolness of the atmosphere. This is my first walking in French air, on the ground and in the air that my parents lived on and breathed. I lived here for 8 years part time from 2006 to 2014. The memories are still fresh, the roads familiar, certain faces too but this has never felt like home, but the closest perhaps to what I imagine a home is to most people. In the wind time walks, the hum of a plane high up in the sky slowly fading away. In the absence of wind, I will walk in the invisible groundless substance

of my thinking, whistle-walking sometimes, as I have done for my last two walks earlier this summer, in Ditchling and in Whitehorse Meadow near home. I may record my thinking in and of air. What is the difference between walking or (whistle) walking in air since air is always there? How long does it take to learn to walk in air and whistle-walk naturally, effortlessly? Since It takes many months to learn to stand or walk on one's two feet, to coordinate the two-hundred muscles involved for each step we make, all united in their effort to move and balance our body against gravity. In the wind time walk





from her golden skin la vache limousine  
limousin cow dark ginger color so fetching in the gentle light  
time walk in the gentle breeze

Sat 10<sup>th</sup> September 11.24am, time walk around a pond

In the air  
the wind  
in air the wind  
time  
in air I walk  
around  
a pond a pond walking around a  
pound a pond upon time upon  
time  
in the air time walk  
in the wind the wind time  
walk I walk around  
upon I  
walk around a pond green  
grass green water green willow tree  
green bushes green bamboo  
time walk  
in air  
whistle in whistle out whistle in  
whistle out whistle in  
whistle out whistle in whistle out  
whistle in whistle out











*Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 9.34am*

Sitting outside in unusually hot sunshine for September, wood pigeons frolicking in the air between a telephone pole, a huge mimosa tree and a walnut tree, occasional gunshots in the distance on this second day of the French hunting season. Breakfast is ready inside, awaiting my fellow fieldworkers Marianne, Stefan and Will in this cosy French gite with an English hint of interior design, a few kilometres from Anlhiac. This is the first chance I have to process and recollect my walking in air of yesterday, in French (air). I came less prepared than on previous occasions. I had read on the plane, my last recollections from Folkestone where I wondered and pondered on my two-evolving walking in air strategies - a recorded live commentary of my walking and thinking and whistle-walking to connect my walking and breathing at a pace that can sustain it, but at the detriment of my thinking. Which made me conclude that perhaps it was the other way around, perhaps it was the air and the ground that were thinking and breathing me. Where does one go from there?

I set off, tuning whistle in my back pocket, binaural recording headphones in my ears and connected to my mobile phone, no clear intention in mind but a direction out there: a path leading down to a small pond with a hilly field on one side, closed by an electric wire for the benefit of a few Limousin cows - a local breed of beef cattle the region is named after - grazing hay from a big feeder. A worrying sight at this time of the year, but inevitable considering the heat and lack of rain of these past few months, the fields are parched and grass rare. The cows are startled by my presence, three of them make a hasty exit, two

others a nonchalant one, their tails wagging left and right in tune with their four-legged steps, to keep flies away. One stays unphased, her head occasionally disappearing in the loose stack of hay in the feeder, before reappearing to look at me calmly, her jaws continuously munching away, her ears sometimes scanning the air, intrigued by my gentle whistling as I film our encounter on my phone, legs steady hip-width apart, arms stretched. We stayed like this for a while, a few meters apart, the electric wire between us, observing each other while doing our own thing. My hands were becoming unsteady, when stomachs full probably (cows have four of them), she walked away, tail wagging, re-joining the others in the next field, leaving behind a trail of fresh dung in small balls, a path in the gentle breeze. Time walked between us both, two and four legged.

Then I went to the adjacent pond where sky and water came together encircled by grasses, a few bushes, a willow tree, and an old wooden bench. I sat there for a while watching white cloud moving slowly across both the blue water sky and the groundless air, mesmerised by the mirrored illusion of a grounded wet air, occasionally blurred by the wind rising gently. Sitting there I watched time walking in the wind across the cloudy water. I filmed a water hemp flower standing and wavering in a green then blue wet sky, whistling at times. Time passed. A few insects buzzed around the white fluffy buds, fish came up for air here and there, gasping. Feet firmly on the ground, absorbed, observing, recording the pervasive stillness around the unfolding of time walking, I was feeling invisible to all creatures around me. Then I walked sideways around the pond, like a crab, following the contours of the watery sky, *joining one to the other*. An attempt to grasp the measure and pace of time walk(ing) across wet grounded air that I had just witnessed. I did this twice forgetting each time to count my steps. Between earth and sky, my breath came and went.