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The Common Place: The Poetics of the Pedestrian in Kevin Huizenga's *Walkin'*

Shiamin Kwa

The first page of Kevin Huizenga's 1998 comic, *Walkin'*, presents the simple rituals accompanying the narrator's walk in a new neighborhood, on a late summer Sunday morning. Its first panel introduces this information in a text box, showing the lower half of the narrator's body, crouched with left knee bent forward as he ties his laces. The second panel presents the quiet beginnings of departure as he shuts the door, revealing his top half: his back, the back of his head. The final panel on the first page presents the narrator in full from behind, in an aerial view that shows a series of pavement squares diminishing in size as they slide from trapezoid to triangle as they stretch farther away from the viewer. He is walking in a suburban landscape, away from us and towards the perpendicular crossings of tree branches and telephone wires that frame the top of the panel (Huizenga 1998 1). The second page continues this shifting perspective between above and below; the limitations of the walker to gravity are attenuated by the weightlessness of his line of vision. The reader is sent, on the second page, to look up, and then down. The wires that hang above him transmit the knowledge of unseen actions and movements, electrons coursing back and forth through the wires strung above our walker; he only hears the sounds that surround those wires, from places equally outside of the grasp of his vision: "I could hear people's voices comin through a screen door. Birds chirping call and response"(Huizenga 1998 2). The eye is shifted downwards, to shadows on the ground: "The sun's low, long shadows and sparkling diamonds in the trees"(Huizenga 1998 2). The comic deploys fragmented language, down to the words themselves ("walkin," "comin"), harmonizing with fragmented images (parts of bodies, parts of moments in time). The crossings in the images, and the crossings of thought and perceived sounds intimate other intersections: between earth-bound and avian, between the

mundane and the numinous. Most importantly, the crossings intimate them as multiply crossed intersections: a weave that cannot be unraveled. We are not looking at layers, but at tightly bound imbrication; the hatch is created by the two-dimensional flatness of the comics page, which forces the lines to cross each other without the relief that would be accommodated by depth. Drawings on the comics page preclude the possibility of separation, which can only occur by a reader's conscious act: "those things are not entangled because I know they are not supposed to be," he thinks. <figure 13.1>

This essay show how Huizenga's comics signal our awareness to that conscious act of supposing. Purposely withholding explanation, and making the reader do the work of parsing the visual assumptions of the surface to understand the basic action depicted in the frame, *Walkin'* models the processes we use when we try to make sense of what we see. We make dozens of these assessments, adjustments, and revisions whenever we look at something. Those processes are each small narratives of meaning, but they are occurring so quickly in our minds that their strangeness is hardly ever noticed. This comic continuously reminds the reader of the strangeness of the common, a strangeness that should give them pause. By making readers attend to the intersections of lines on the surface of the page, his comics suggest the possibilities of more metaphysical intersections. The careful attention to pacing, and the deliberate parallels between the pace of the walk and the structure of the comic, highlight the requirements of marked space and time in the construction of meaning.

Huizenga's works frequently insinuate the profound relationship between efforts of the bodily and mundane with those of the sublime, and work towards developing an accord between profane and sacred time that conceptualizes a relationship famously defined by Eliade:

Religious man lives in two kinds of time, of which the more important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites. This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from nonreligious man; the former refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present; he attempts to regain a sacred time that, from one point of view, can be homologized to eternity (Eliade 70).

Huizenga's stories question these distinctions, first by suggesting that non-religious man, too, occupies both kinds of time; and, second, by showing how those two kinds of time are mutually generative rather than independent entities. The two kinds of time do not exist separately, they suggest, but rather exist only because each cannot exist without the other. In Huizenga's work, time outside of time is the direct result of the consistent pacing and deliberate rhythm established by the comics. This is accomplished by the structure of the comics themselves: a successive pattern of squares on the page that draw the eye along the path they create. The steady movement of the eye and the hand as the reader encounters these patterns finds its counterpart within those pages, in the figure of the walker.

Born in 1977, Kevin Huizenga has been producing some of the most critically-acclaimed small press comics since the 1990s. They have been anthologized in the *Best American Comics* collections and have been awarded five Ignatz awards by the Small Press Expo, which supports comics and cartooning works by small press or creator-owned projects. Part of a generation of artists creating what can broadly be defined as "art" or "literary" comics, Huizenga creates work that is distinguished by a keen interest in negotiating the gentle balance between sharply astute

observation and abstracted and generalized delivery. The frequent protagonist of his works, Glenn Ganges, resembles archetypes of the Sunday funnies, recalling characters in the comics of Charles Schulz (“Peanuts”) and Chic Young (“Blondie”), with their sparsely defined hairlines and profiles, suburban landscapes, and the activities that occupy their quotidian rhythms. They wash dishes, check their mail, read the newspaper, and stroll on their sidewalks. These steady rhythms are precisely what create the impact of their concluding punchlines, which unfold with a combination of inevitability and surprise that lingers in the mind in a time that is equally “reversible and recoverable” only through the careful ritual of the everyday. Our encounters with Ganges involve walks from the mailbox back into the home; walks through suburban neighborhood streets; and walks through the aisles of a suburban megastore. The stories that he has produced over the last two decades vary in subject and storyline; yet, they share an aesthetic that relies on the steady and slow. This aesthetic extends from the very lines of the drawing to the lines of the narrative, and builds conclusions that reach outside of the mundane and into the metaphysical.

Huizenga’s comics build a sympathetic framework that bridge the mundane and the numinous, so that the form itself is the source of the comic’s meaning. Stories frequently involve a journey that culminates in revelation. They all also involve walking. The walk, with its repetitive patterns, its steady and even pace, its un-remarkability, is the reason that, when used as an adjective, “pedestrian” signals dullness, monotony, and the absence of interest. The walker, the pedestrian, is common, but in Huizenga’s comics, that commonness is the means towards unraveling life’s mysteries. The mysteries of reading find their analogue in the mystery of the walker’s encounters with the mundane, mystery that he feels as “not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and

confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication” (Otto 85). The characters in Huizenga’s comics do a great deal of walking, and even spirit quests to search for feathered ogres involve walking through the equally repetitive strip malls that limn the Midwest’s exurban sprawl (Huizenga 2006). This essay examines how Huizenga’s comic demonstrates walking, as a subject. Walking mimics the structural pacing of the Comic, as panels steadily unfold in space in the same way that footsteps proceed in time. The relationship between walking and its desired destination represents a commitment to the physical labor that makes it distinct from waiting; the transition between the sacred and the profane implies a ritual act in between the two that makes access to the sacred possible, but the walker’s position suggests that everyday action is the ritual that allows for the access.

The walker does not wait; rather, the walker abides, taking part in a continuous action, a holding pattern that has its own meaning. The pace of walking is also a system of measuring; an extension of the body into space, it measures out time with each movement. Each step is a punctuation point that marks the beginning and endpoint of the measurement, and this essay is not only about those points, but about the movements in between them. In his uses of the panels native to the comics form to direct the reader’s movement and pace, Huizenga figures reading as a kind of walking. He exposes the crucial role that this rhythm plays in establishing an achievable suspension of time, the suspension of time articulated as sacred time by Eliade. In Huizenga’s formulation, suspended time is instead firmly tied to the profane. A journey is made by the accrual of units that each, individually, are close to senselessness, but cohere into meaning at the end. There is a human drive, Frank Kermode argues, to make narrative meaning of what comes between beginning and end: “The clock’s ‘tick-tock’ I take to be a model of what we call

a plot, an organization which humanizes time by giving it a form; and the interval between ‘tock’ and ‘tick’ represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort we need to humanize”(Kermode 45). Huizenga’s comics show how the disorganized time between the tocks and the ticks are precisely meaningful because their disorganization gives definition to the end product. They suggest the productive possibilities of resisting the organizing impulse that Kermode notes in order to prepare oneself for the moments of clarity that can only cohere if there is something to emerge from. In these journey stories, Huizenga reframes the distinctions of sacred and profane, placing himself in the tradition of a rich community of walker-philosophers. His comics suggest that it is precisely the rhythms of pacing, and the abiding that it creates, that define how revelation is reached. Revelation, in this model, is not the point of entry but in fact the entire progression, a progression that is defined by the assumption of continuity between fragments: step by step, frame to frame. By connecting the deliberate pacing established between word and image on the comics page with the physical labor of walking, Huizenga redirects readers to a celebration of the processes of typically ignored continuity that connect the inevitable “points of interest” that vie for our attention.

Comics provide a model for reading practices based on continuity, a continuity which is native to the aura of comics itself. Jared Gardner notes a shared “archival drive” that indexes a “compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues (the serial gap inherent to comic production, mirroring and complicating the gaps between the frames themselves) that drives the collector in search of missing issues,” which elides the collecting practice of the comics reader with the reading practice of finding closure between them (Gardner 173). The

formal qualities of comics, he argues, are what make them so resistant to easy binary formulations and is, he argues, better defined as “a bifocal form”:

Like the archive, the comics form retains that which cannot be reconciled to linear narrative—the excess that refuses cause-and-effect argument, the trace which threatens to unsettle the present’s narrative of its own past (and thereby of itself). The comics form is forever troubled by that which cannot be reconciled, synthesized, unified, contained within the frame; but it is in being so troubled that the form defines itself. The excess data—the remains of the everyday—is always left behind (even as the narrative progresses forward in time), a visual archive for the reader’s necessary work of rereading, resorting, and reframing...It is precisely the inability or refusal to choose (between text and image, past and present, graphic and novel, popular culture and art/literature, etc.) that draws creators to this form in the first place (Gardner 177).

Gardner astutely categorizes the way that the comic’s form is a model for the reading practice of the comics reader and collector himself. The constant balance between the acceptance of the surplus of information in the face of comics’ archival quality, and the desire to complete the meaning between sequences, is characteristic of the comics reading process.

Closure has been most famously defined by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics*, as the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole”(McCloud 63). He singles out the gutter, or the space between the panels, as the central defining characteristic of comics. The panel and gutter relationship works to “fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality (McCloud 67). This distinction is pursued by Barbara Postema in her study of not just gutters but other kinds of absences and voids in the comic:

making meaning from what is missing. Taking her cues from the semiotically-inflected work of Thierry Groensteen (Groensteen 2009; 2013), she offers readings of how comics both create gaps—structural, sequential, narratological—and close them. As she explains, “the same principles are applied for looking at the semiotics of the image, the semiotics of the page and of the narrative, because the same processes are involved in creating narration out of a panel, a sequence, a narrative, revolving around asserting the gaps that are present and then offering ways to erase the gaps (Postema xx). These critics all emphasize the reader’s participation in bringing closure to the gaps of meaning in the comics text.

This is not a concept exclusive to comics. Reader-response critics have long argued for the crucial role that the implied reader plays in the construction of meaning from a literary text. Wolfgang Iser suggested that the successes of uncovering “textual structures and structured acts of comprehension” in literary texts relied on the “degree in which the text establishes itself as a correlative in the reader’s consciousness. This ‘transfer’ of text [though initiated by the text] depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader’s faculties of perceiving and processing” (Iser 107). The “gutters” of the comics find their corollaries in the three dots of the ellipsis, which themselves are a device used in the comic strip (Lind 251). In her eloquent study of the ellipsis, Anne Toner describes the way that the punctuation mark signals an effort to capture, in writing, the pauses, hesitations, and fraught silences that come with speech. Completeness exists in thought, whereas speech itself is fragmented:

Unfinished sentences can work productively as a force for social cohesion, rather than standing out as semantic failures. The unfinished sentence can promote intimacy between speakers or show deference towards an interlocutor. It can also have a strong

illocutionary force. We can make propositions and give them extra emotional force by failing to deliver them fully. Not saying something often says it better (Toner 5).

The ellipsis marks are visual reminders in written and printed texts of something gone unsaid, and the gutters of the comics page are no less than the constant presence of what is left out from panel to panel. In the absence of language and, in the case of the gutters, action takes on illocutionary force by prompting the reader to draw conclusions about the relationship between the panels that are implied by the absences. Interruption thus becomes constancy, establishing a pace, which is reinforced by the actions on the page; starts and stops, pauses to think through those shifts, become a single action. By drawing the reader into colluding with the pace of the narrator of *Walkin'*, they draw her also into more intimate collusion by making meaning together with Huizenga's pedestrian heroes. This connection is underscored by Huizenga's device of bringing the reader along with his narrator on the walk, viewing the world from the speaker's point of view so that the reader, too, becomes a pedestrian.

The remainder of this essay reads the ways that the motif of the pedestrian in *Walkin'* examines the practices of ellipsis that achieve a suspension of time. This suspension asserts the capacity for so-called profane space and activity in continuity with the sacred. A continuum of the sacred of the everyday is a motif that recurs throughout Huizenga's work, and which finds its most direct address here. From the squares of the frames themselves, to the parcels of visual and textual language that they inscribe, to the contemplation of the body as it extends into space, these comics insistently present the reader with these repetitive, and necessarily limited, units that can only be understood at the end of the motion. Curiously, the understanding that comes at the end of the motion is that all the action that came before it was crucial. It is precisely the

fragmentation of language and image that arrests the attention of the reader, so that the process of becoming drawn in to the pace and rhythms of the comic and ultimately reaching the expansive conclusion is entirely in step with the walker's progress and experience within the space of the comic. *Walkin'* thus achieves its illocutionary act upon the reader in both content and form, arguing that reading is a kind of walking.

Walkin' resituates the nature walk described by Henry David Thoreau, whose essay "Walking" argued for the necessity of a passage through nature unsullied by the interventions of human civilization:

When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a mall?...Of course it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, if they do not carry us thither. I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit .

Huizenga instead transplants this ideal walk into the Midwest's residential landscape, with its closely spaced houses, fenced yards, and power lines, but adopting that same urgency of purpose towards linking body and spirit that Thoreau sought in the woods. He walks through the kind of landscape that Rebecca Solnit describes as reflecting "a desire to live in a world of predestination rather than chance, to strip the world of its wide-open possibilities and replace them with freedom of choice in the marketplace" (Solnit 255). Unlike the paths in the woods, these sidewalks transmit an inevitability of passage, controlling the directions that the pedestrian may take. Thoreau requires the woods to create a separation between himself and the "village" that represents the cares and obligations of other people: "In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?" (Thoreau np).

Walkin' replicates the sense of being, and of being bodily, as the narrator sets off; but, unlike Thoreau, it argues for a link of the spirit with everyday encounter, where the sounds of birds and the sounds of hair dryers are equally able to transform the one who encounters them. By thinking of the streets that he walks on, he has reached a level of illumination that acknowledges, and extends beyond, the cognitive clarity that scientists have recently linked to walking (Berman, Jonides, and Kaplan). Instead, walking is described as a sacred activity, in the sense that it becomes out of time. The subject of *Walkin'* is simple: the speaker has moved to a new neighborhood, and these are the last days of summer. He walks alone on these new streets, taking in the new sights, sounds, and smells as they appear to him. Many of the pages are nearly wordless, simply showing the objects of the walker's observation, and sometimes accompanied by text that record snippets of sound or fragments of thought. As he progresses in his walk, the drawings within the panels begin to lose definition and detail in places; shapes emerge from between the crossed wires on the page (Huizenga 1998 7). Bird sounds mimic the sounds of words, and the panels become blurs of impressionistic shapes and fragments that resolve as the walker finds himself in a park, watching a parent and child in the playground. The parent and child become a metonym for the walker's sense of the universe; as he observes them, the pages resolve into a single observation: "I am that kid" (Huizenga 1998 26). This conclusion compresses the impressions witnessed and catalogued in the preceding pages into a sublime moment of identification with an anonymous parent and child, forming less a rejection of the sacred than a repositioning of the sacred into the everyday human world.

The walk takes place on a Sunday morning, but this walker, in his ripped jeans and t-shirt, is not walking to church. The details in his lyrical monologue suggest a deep familiarity with going to church; *Walkin'* takes those recognizable pieces and replaces them with the objects he

sees on the street. He thus makes a case for finding the numinous in the surroundings of the everyday world: “Trees cast jigsaw puzzle shadows on the houses and moss grows in-between shingles. /I’m feeling real alive, awake, soaking it all in. Didn’t go to church this morning but here you go, a squirrel’s Sabbath, the robins saying ‘when peace like a sidestreet attendeth’ and the trees clap their hands, the Sun of God Baptist Assembly” (Huizenga 1998 4). The details he sees on the street are part of a neighborhood that is “older than the Brady Bunch suburb and...still technically in the city” (Huizenga 1998 4). The trees, wires, objects, and animals in yards and sidewalks form their own church: a “squirrel’s Sabbath.” The sound of the robins evokes the hymn “When Peace Like a River,” and its first verse: “When peace like a river attendeth my way, /when sorrows like sea billows roll, /whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, /it is well, it is well with my soul.” The robins substitute “sidestreet” for river, and the trees substitute their clapping branches for the hands of human congregants.

Having thus established the reader in this church of the “sun of God,” the next few pages begin a nearly wordless reverie providing a caesura in the progression of the Comic. On page five, the walk is interrupted as the speaker passes a chain-link fence to observe a dog sleeping on its side in a backyard (Huizenga 1998 5). The page emphasizes the simultaneous ordinariness and significance of the moment by placing nearly identical panels side by side in three rows. The pairs of panels are thus remarkable for the similarities between them; rather than fulfilling the ellipsis of action, the gutter suggests only the slightest of differences, so that the connection made by the mind is one of profound subtlety. In the first row, the objects framed in the view are the same: the back door, the covered barbecue, the window, and the sleeping dog. The reader looks from left to right, then right to left again, to make sense of the sequence; whereas the image on the left shows the figure’s passage arrested by a sight beyond the fence, the image on

the right shows him stopped with hand resting on the fence. The action of the ellipsis, then, is the cessation of action: a rest. Likewise, the second pair of images also evokes stasis. The images are identical, except for the thought bubble on the left, which obscures some of the objects in the upper left quadrant. The walker wonders “Old hound...wonder if it’ll start yalping in its dreams.” The following pair provides the answer: side-by-side close-ups of the sleeping dog, its position unchanged from left to right (Huizenga 1998 5). What Huizenga accomplishes here is a suspension of time, accomplished in part because of the comics reader’s expectation of closure of action between the panels. When there is no action, the reader is forced to think instead about the significance of that fact. In a form where readers frequently do the work of bridging or interpreting absence, where an action has occurred between those panels, they are here confronted with the absence of absence, a device that forces a pause for contemplation. This is, of course, exactly what our narrator does; his forward trajectory is arrested by the sight of the inert dog, and he pauses to observe him. Rather than emphasizing change or difference, the frame represents the absence of movement or change. <figure 13.2>

This recording of the absence of movement is a reminder to us, the readers, of the gentle balance between the content of the comic, which is the walk to the park bench taken by the narrator, and the making of the comic, which is likely made indoors, perhaps at a table, and long after the fact. The distance of recording finds an easy berth in the motif of the frame, which evokes a conscious capturing. The comics frame evokes the window introduced early on in Sebald’s monument to memory and, significantly, to walking: *The Rings of Saturn*. In it, Sebald recalls how he began to write these pages after a walk he had taken in the English countryside; the immobility at the time of writing is inextricably linked to his memory of walking, and the link between the two is created by the frame of his hospital room window: “all that could be seen

of the world from my bed was the colourless patch of sky framed in the window...all I could hear was the wind sweeping in from the country and buffeting the window; and in between, when the sound subsided, there was the never entirely ceasing murmur in my own ears” (Sebald 4–5). Sebald’s window comes to represent the series of journeys of thought and memory evoked by the remembered walk, the recording of which is also itself encased in memory. *Walkin’* echoes the window evoked by Sebald with the frames on the comics pages, which begin to gesture to their fragmentary nature as if bent by their own “never entirely ceasing” susurrus of memory.

The wordless panels that follow continue to record the crossed lines seen on the first page, and continue to depict objects from the walker’s point of view, but inserting greater formal innovation. On page seven, six panels show the street scene as viewed from different angles, intercut with wires, poles, and tree trunks and tops. The twelve syllables “carless moment/the tips of trees/are little trees” appear in the top right panel, and the panels beneath show the scenery leaking out into the gutters, touching the panel next to it in the middle row and merging the content across the gutter in the bottom row (Huizenga 1998 7). What is seen begins to inform the way that it is presented: the middle panel of the next page shows a central pole from which a mesh of crossed wires emerges, and across which other lines pass; the bottom edge of the panel sinks to the bottom right rather than crossing horizontally on the page, as if mimicking one of the rays of wire depicted within its frames (Huizenga 1998 8). The walker pauses to contemplate the summer he has spent landscaping other people’s lawns, and the possibilities in his future that he has imagined: in this recorded moment, he himself is that gutter between past and present. Objects in his path become labeled, creating a taxonomy of his landscape: the red squirrel, the “serious exercise ladies and happy dogs,” the sparrows (Huizenga 1998 11) and on the very next

page the labels tell what the images do not show. Juxtaposed against images of house fronts, the text boxes read: “fat bees on lilacs,” “and butterflies,” “millions of ants,” “daddy long-legs,” “earwigs,” “millipedes,” and “roly polys” (Huizenga 1998 12). In the remarkable series of pages that follow, the frames become increasingly abstracted and strange, and continue to meditate on the way that the walk accommodates the act of summoning meaning from these minutely captured fragments.

The walk becomes visually syncopated as the walker is progressively absorbed in his surroundings over the course of ten pages. The content of the frames are necessarily fragments of the whole picture, as emphasized by the unusual angles and focus on specific shapes or objects in a panel. On page ten of *Walkin'*, little symbols appear in the panels to denote invisible senses that are nonetheless perceived: the apple smell of shampoo, the whirring noise of someone's blow-dryer through a window. The walker's nose and ear are unusually pronounced in close-up in complementary panels (Huizenga 1998 10). This visual emphasis on parts is echoed by the sparseness of the language, sometimes so spare that it has been abbreviated to incomplete words as well as incomplete sentences. Birds on a wire have a conversation in six abstractly drawn panels on page 13, and the listener strains to make sense of their bird sounds. He hears “cheap tea,” “Tallahassee,” “squeaky clean,” “sleep sweetly,” “easy” (Huizenga 1998 13), all rhapsodies on the long “e” sound that become increasingly urgent: “freezing scene! Keep sinking!” (Huizenga 1998 14). Alongside the impenetrable sounds of the birds, the vistas within the panels begin to lose their definition as well.

The silent distortions of panels and their contents are at their most remarkable as the six panel pages become pulled as if into a vortex at the center of the page. Shadow and whiteness are whorled together, and open on to the following page which bears curves, crossed lines,

fragments of the lines describing treetops in previous panels, and the sensation of viewing a glare bouncing off a reflective surface or perhaps of simply looking directly at the sun itself (Huizenga 1998 18–19). These pages could be read as nothing more than a mimetic representation of the walking narrator being blinded by the lambent light of a summer morning, looking up and seeing a whirl of dazzling white dappled with treetop shadows. The reader might also consider that what is represented here is not what the narrator inside the comic sees at the moment; but rather a depiction of the artist's experience of trying to remember and capture the moment, which is now obscured by the passage of time. This latter interpretation is supported by the pages that follow, which appear as drawings made over text; the muddle of light and dark splotches overlaid over a nonsensical typewritten text suggests a surplus of text and image. Again, the panels are separated in orderly fashion in the first page, and then melted towards each other in the subsequent page (Huizenga 1998 20–21). On the last page of the sequence, the blank space appears as the overlay, reversing the expected process of dark marks made on a white page to white splotches redacting an existing under-layer of dark marks (Huizenga 1998 22). <figure 13.3>

Frederic Gros writes this about walking:

Walking is a matter not just of truth, but also of reality. To walk is to experience the real. Not reality as pure physical exteriority or as what might count as a subject, but reality as what holds good: the principle of solidity, of resistance. When you walk you prove it with every step: the earth holds good. With every pace, the entire weight of my body finds support and rebounds, takes a spring. There is everywhere a solid base somewhere underfoot (Gros 94).

The walker cannot help but be aware of his body; each step is an extension away from, and then towards, the ground. Yet, if walking is a matter of truth and reality, so is the narrator's

perception of the world and the things left untouched during his passage. The glare of white unreadability blinds the reader along with the narrator. The walker is returned from this blinding white back to the crossed power lines and the conversational birds; their chatter continues as the words careen between the crossed lines and white spaces. This detachment from the blur of black and white in the preceding page asks the reader to consider what makes one more legible and less strange than the other. Finally, as he navigates another hill he comes upon a place to stop: “As if the morning, the walk, the sights, smells, sounds, feeling weren’t enough I stumble on a park in a valley” (Huizenga 1998 24). He proceeds to a picnic table bench, and sits with his back to the table, facing the playground.

The fragmented visuals are again reinforced by the fragmented language. The point of view shifts from behind the shoulder of the narrator to a playground in the distance to a close-up of the slide, its curves set in relief against the straight angles of the swing set’s legs. A box that straddles the two top panels contains the words “Over there’s a/parent loving/hearing a child/babble breathless/from the playground” and the bottom panel resolves into another panel in which he is now viewed at a distance and from the side. “I’m that kid,” reads the text (Huizenga 1998 26). The word “loving” becomes an object of interpretation as well. If the sentence should read that the parent is loving the sound of the child’s babble, the caesura would more properly belong after “parent” instead of after “loving,” and, like the fragmented panels in the pages before it, the subtle differences of meaning of those lines become the work of the reader. From the faceless body with bending knee at the beginning of the comic, to the stick figure sitting alone on a bench in the park, something has changed. He has begun with possibility, and he has ended with a magical accord between past, present, and future. What has happened between these two positions has been the walk.

What Huizenga accomplishes by the end of *Walkin'* is an articulation of a question about purposefulness and its relationship to walking. How is it, we are asked, that that which is so bounded by gravity, that which pulls our feet one after the other back to the ground, is also the means by which we reach towards the sky? In this comic, both the passage of the walker through the streets and side streets of his newly adopted neighborhood, and the passage of the reader through the pages employ the same processes of attending and appraisal. *Walkin'*, in all of its strange hesitations and surprise, anatomizes the experience of walking as not only akin to the experience of reading, but to the experience of perceiving the world around us. By traversing the spaces between, whether one step at a time, or one panel at a time, we are broadening our capacities for reaching each time from the terrestrial to the aerial. Rather than trying to apply an order to that space between the “tock” and the “tick” of the progression of our lives, Huizenga suggests a kind of time travel made all the more remarkable because it is achievable by each of us in our profane, but no less magical, world.

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