



**Miscellaneous notes on walking:**  
A response to Nikta Mohammadi's Memory Stone

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**THE LOWRY**

I was mid-walk when Nikta sent me a link to her film, striding around the walls of Berwick-upon-Tweed. I was up in the town that weekend for the film festival that I used to work at, taking a much needed break to recover from screen fatigue ahead of the closing film. Cinemas are perfect places to discover new ideas, but you need time away from them to process what you've seen, and where better to do so than in a brisk Northumberland breeze.

"Thanks for sending this Nikta, I'll give it a watch when I get back home because the Premier Inn wifi isn't up to speed lol."

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We met in London but me and Nikta both moved out of the city during the pandemic - her to Hebden Bridge (near where the Brontes lived), me to Stroud (home of Laurie Lee) - burnt out by the precarity of living in the capital as arts workers. She's been there ever since but I moved back to London a couple of months ago, ready to give it one more shot.

Calling from her house, Nikta tells me that after she made the move, she stopped working full time and felt more in charge of her own energy, exploring the area at her own speed. I nod in agreement from my shared living room, chatting with her after a hectic day's work at the four-days-a-week arts-adjacent job I do so I can have a single studio day to myself a week. The fragmentary nature of this text has emerged from me jotting notes on my phone here and there, unable to find the time to sit down and let thoughts naturally trickle onto the page.

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It would be remiss to talk about walking in the present moment without mentioning marching. Down in Cirencester, round the corner from Stroud, they're marching for the Right to Roam after a landowner has just installed electronic gates to monetise a park that's been free for over three hundred years. I watch on Instagram as a mass trespass unfolds in the park, as hundreds try and make a stand so we can claw onto the small slither of green space that isn't taken away from us by private ownership.

Elsewhere, in towns and cities across the country, we march for Palestine, coming together to make our voices heard, speak out against genocide and call for a ceasefire now. The day before Nikta's link arrives in my inbox, myself and other festival attendees - filmmakers, programmers, audience members - gather outside the town hall before heading into an llam screening. I make plans with friends from London to regroup for the next march through the city's streets later in the month.

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Over Zoom, Nikta tells me about how walking is used as a tool in cinema, connecting scenes and locations together through the movement of characters. Sayeh, the protagonist of Memory Stone, walks through the countryside flying remote locations; it's an absurd motive that allows him to wander aimlessly through the lush countryside of Calderdale and let his mind drift. Time collapses as the landscape comes to life and Sayeh walks amongst his dreams and memories. Figures from another era step into the present day and archive cutaways interrupt the unfolding narrative, giving the film a dream-like quality with its flow state. You can view Nikta's process like an excavation of the landscape, digging through the grass in search of stories that all feed off the same soil.

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I've never been to the area but the Visit Calderdale website tells me I'm spoilt for choice when it comes to walking routes. Guided walks, bus walks, family friendly walks, with routes to download and a cache of leaflets and booklets in Halifax Central Library for visitors to borrow. 'Walkers are welcome' proclaims the website, but I don't know if that statement is true for everyone.

I made a film about walking when I lived in Stroud, where I went in search of an eighteenth century namesake. There's a line in when I mention the feeling of wandering solo in the hills of Gloucestershire 'with my headphones on and no dog by my side', and all of the stray looks that attracts - a feeling akin to the one conjured up by the jolting siren that Nikta deploys. It's not a noise that everyone hears, but when they do, it rings in their ears for a while.

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Strangely, one of the times I felt like I most belonged in the countryside was when I rocked up with a crew of mates to make my film, dragging boxes kit down the Cotswold way on a Saturday morning. We were moving with a purpose that couldn't be questioned, ironic given that the majority of what we were shooting was me, somewhat vulnerably, walking alone. When I watch Memory Stone, I wonder if Nikta felt the same, reclaiming the landscape for herself by making a film about how alienating it can feel at times. Maybe the next time someone excavates the area, amongst the layers of history they'll dig up one of Sayeh's flyers from the soil.