

# LANDLINE

## FIVE WALKS IN SKYE

### Questions:

1. In his Ecological Approach to Visual Perception, the psychologist James Gibson defined the environment as consisting 'of the earth and the sky with objects on the earth and in the sky, of mountains and clouds, fires and sunsets, pebbles and stars'. Look at the earth. Are there objects on it? What about the ground? Is it a surface of support? Do things stand, sit or lie on it? Find a pebble and a plant. Would you say that the pebble is on the ground and the plant in it? Try measuring the height of the plant above the ground. Why does this turn out to be impossible?
2. Let us look at the sky. Are there any objects in it? Are birds objects? Are clouds objects? Mountains can rise higher than clouds. So could they belong to the sky and not the earth? We have to breathe as we walk, so do we belong simultaneously to both sky and earth? Are we walking or flying? Now think about light. Can we see light or only things in the light? If we can only see things in the light, then how can we see the sky?
3. Let us look at the road. We say it has a surface. What has happened to the surface of this road? What, if anything, makes it different from the ground on either side? How can we tell there's a road at all? If the road has a surface, then does the ground have one too? If not, what's the difference between walking the unsurfaced ground and walking the surfaced road? The road is not flat. It goes sometimes uphill, sometimes downhill. How do we know whether we are climbing or descending? Can we feel the contours of the land?
4. Let's think about the weather. What is the weather like, and how can we tell? If it is raining, do you hear the rain? Or do you hear the land as the raindrops play on it? How do we know if it is windy? Can you touch wind? Can you feel it? If you can feel the wind but not touch it, what's the difference between touch and feeling? Or between listening and sound? Or between vision and light?
5. What about our footprints? They are the way we mark the land in walking. Let's think of all the different ways our boots leave a mark. How long do these marks last? What can we read from them? Walking back along the same trail, can we recognise our prints from the way out?
6. Are there lines in nature? Many have argued that there are no lines; that the line is nothing but a convention of drawing. So when we come to the tree, let's draw it. And let's think about the relation between the drawn lines and the tree itself.
7. 'We must reflect in order to measure and not measure in order to reflect'; so wrote the philosopher Gaston Bachelard. We come to the milestone. What does the milestone tell us about the way we measure the earth? Is walking itself a way of measuring? Then how can we measure how far we have walked? If the milestone apportions the landscape, then how can it simultaneously become part of the landscape apportioned? Someone put it there. Does that make it an artefact?