
‘I will walk five hundred miles’ – the line from the song seems somewhat appropriate to the issues at stake in Simon O’Sullivan’s *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, at least if we shift the parameters of the walk from the ‘coming home’ or the ‘returning’ to that of a continuous departure without return, a continuous process of exile; a movement away from the known, the habitual, home – from representation as such – towards invention, mutation, a sense of continuous and homeless creativity. You will have to walk five hundred miles, and then some.

As the title suggests, this is a book of encounters and it is set up as such from the very first page. ‘An object of an encounter’, O’Sullivan begins,

is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed ... With such a non-encounter our habitual ways of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place. (p. 1)

Against this notion of recognition O’Sullivan poses a notion of the encounter: ‘With a genuine encounter ... the contrary is the case. Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge are disrupted. We are forced to thought’ (p. 1).

This notion of the encounter as a kind of ethical practice, but also as a kind of affirmative rupture constitutes in many ways the flow of the book, the current that runs beneath its surface. This is, in this sense, not merely a book on Deleuze and Guattari, but a book that seeks to do Deleuze and Guattari; it is not simply a book on ethico-aesthetics, or the production of subjectivity, but a book that proceeds through an ethico-aesthetic program, a kind of...
becoming through the encounter, and it is, as we shall see, in this latter dimension, in what it does rather than what it reads, in what it performs, in its program, that the book really finds its strength.

There are three different kinds of encounter in this book. First, there is the encounter with the DeleuzoGuattarian concepts; second, there is the encounter with the artistic and other practices explored; and third, there is the encounter between the two, that is to say, between the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts and the artistic practices. These three different kinds of encounters are distributed across what is functionally speaking two different books: a book of inventories and a book of cartographies.

The two first chapters of the book take on what is strictly speaking an archival function. They operate as inventories of concepts and relate primarily to the first kind of encounter. The subsequent three chapters, however, involve primarily the second and third kinds of encounter, and imply a kind of opening up of the concepts referred to in the first two chapters, a kind of cracking of the inventory, a desire to make the concepts move somehow beyond and despite themselves. Is there anything more DeleuzoGuattarian in spirit and style than this desire to make something vibrate? The archive, in a sense, becomes a map, or better a cartography, as these concepts are now made to travel all that distance to where the necessary encounters can be generated; to where they can open up to non-habitual modes of thought; open up, in a sense, to the potential they incorporate. The archivist becomes a cartographer as he moves with the concepts. You will have to walk five hundred miles, and then some.

It is not that the first two chapters of the book are of no value. The archive or inventory functions as a point of departure, a kind of springboard from which to set off on a voyage of discovery. In the third chapter, we thus find an encounter between the notion of ‘the minor’ and the militant guerrilla practice of the first generation of the Red Army Faction. The practice of the group is read here, with some reservations, in terms of a particularly minor form of collective subjectivity; and this, it seems, becomes the site of a particular politics; politics in this sense being necessarily ‘minor’ and involving re-orderings of affective regimes, ‘new affective assemblages’, a kind of ‘stuttering and stammering’, a prototype for a minor form of collective living (p. 97).

The following chapter moves between a number of DeleuzoGuattarian notions, most interestingly perhaps the notion of ‘the plane of immanence’, and the work of Robert Smithson. O’Sullivan’s take on Smithson’s practice is configured around two interesting concepts: the notion of art as a kind of practical philosophy and the notion, touched upon briefly towards the end of the chapter, of a kind of ‘geoaesthetics’, the invention of a new ‘earth’ for a new kind of people (p. 120).

Finally, the fifth chapter of the book presents us with an encounter between Richter’s work – and significantly the process implied by his work – and Deleuze’s writing on Leibniz and the Baroque. Towards the end of the
chapter the text moves away from Richter’s paintings towards a more expanded sense of practice and briefly explores Chtcheglov’s work on the Situationist City through the Baroque and the notion of folding and extension.

A book of the encounter, then, but also, and through these encounters, a book of inventories and a book of cartographies. It is, in other words, a book of two speeds: the relatively low velocity of the inventory (the first kind of ‘simple’ encounter of the book, a gathering of tools and strategies), and the relatively high velocity, the speeding-up, involved in the cartography constituted by the complex encounters between O'Sullivan himself, the concepts outlined and the art works explored. This speeding up, of course, makes use of the lower velocities of the inventory; it takes the localized speeds of the first book – strolls across what is in a sense a known terrain – and sets off on a journey that necessarily demands a higher degree of velocity in order to travel the necessary distances. In this second book, it becomes a question of dismantling stable meanings, unbinding the potentials locked into the concepts and practices explored, making them mutate.

In the end, the strength of the book – what is so very interesting about it – is not that it brings up a set of Deleuzian and DeleuzoGuattarian concepts (these concepts are well known and have been staked out many times before) but that it applies them in a spirit that seems truly DeleuzoGuattarian to a number of practices, and that in these complex encounters, it generates something, it produces something slightly tweaked, it opens up to a site where practice can be thought anew. There is a constant focus on novelty, creativity, invention: a journey across the desert to see Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*; a trajectory through the staccato tonalities of the RAF manifestos, its stuttering and stammering – what extraordinary journeys; what extraordinary encounters! This, to me, seems to be the passion of the book, a passion for the practice of ethics, the practice of aesthetics. You have to look for these complex encounters; you have to walk five hundred miles, and through the desert, as it were. In a sense, what O'Sullivan does, is to follow that extraordinary statement made in Deleuze’s book on Foucault: to write is to struggle; it is to become; it is to make a diagram; it is to make a map; it is to be a cartographer (Deleuze, 1999[1988]: 44). Two kinds of encounters, two kinds of speeds: as much as this book is an inventory of DeleuzoGuattarian concepts, it is a book of cartography, a book of travelling, a book of paths, a book of a very peculiar kind of peripatetics: you have to walk five hundred miles, and then some.

Reference


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Mitchell’s work on pictures is characterized by the rare coincidence of two virtues. That the long-serving editor of *Critical Inquiry* should demonstrate a broad theoretical sophistication may come as no surprise to readers of that journal, or of the same author’s *Iconology* (1987[1986]) and *Picture Theory* (1995). Less easily anticipated is the omnivorous, Candide-like appetite with which he forages in the entire field of human images. The smoking World Trade Center, the cloned Dolly the Sheep, illustrations by William Blake, Antony Gormley’s sculptural avatars, Robert Frank’s photographs, native Australian dot pictures, film scenarios of various kinds, hapless abstract paintings from the 1990s, all provide material for his speculations. The apparent naivety is not of course a contradiction of the sophistication. It is its engine, driving the kinds of straightforward inquiry that ‘mature’ disciplines are prone to disesteem. The guiding principle of Mitchell’s enterprise is that the intellectual barriers behind which academic specializations tend to be protected are there to be ignored, or to be rendered transparent; and never more deservedly so than when they serve to reinforce class divisions in the wide field of visual culture. His ministry to pictures, then, forms part of that liberal extension of the curriculum that has been gaining ground since the 1970s. The desires referred to in his title are analogous to the silenced desires of the ‘abject or downcast Other, the minority or subaltern that has been so central to the development of modern studies in gender, sexuality and ethnicity’ (p. 29).

It is not often in the humanities that breadth of learning is combined with an expansive and eclectic approach to the range of objects to which that learning is addressed. The combination is indeed attractive. It is significant that a high proportion of the papers from which Mitchell’s book is composed had their first airings as keynote addresses and invited papers delivered to a range of conferences and symposia throughout the world. There is a small price to be paid in the occasional repetition of arguments and examples. While Mitchell’s important categorization of ‘object relations’ gets a key chapter to itself under the tripartite heading of ‘Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry’, for instance, there are recurring reminders throughout the book of the ways in which the relevant social and psychological mechanisms operate to make ‘things’ become ‘special’ (p. 193). We also hear much of the second commandment. It can be argued, though, that the frequency with which Mitchell’s examples resonate to his themes is actually a fair measure of their interdisciplinary potential, while it is clear both that the various papers were originally composed with a range of overall concerns in mind, and that the resulting material has been shaped to the purposes of a continuous argument. In fact, the essay-like character of Mitchell’s several chapters is one of the clear advantages of his book, allowing him to try on ideas and explore their limits, and thus to avoid the tendency for interdisciplinary studies to generate pretentious theory (a tendency well enough exemplified in some of the academic material to which Mitchell makes reference). Though he is
often serious – for example in his asides on the current political complexion
of the US – he is never solemn.

The 16 chapters of the book are divided into three parts: Images, Objects and
Media. Mitchell is concerned with the animism of images – not simply their
ability to take on lives of their own, but also their tendency to show that
which we may not easily acknowledge about the lives we ourselves are
leading, and about the desires and fears by which those lives are governed.
It has to be said that the art-historical precedents for study of the animism of
images are not altogether encouraging. This is perhaps because it has
generally proved easier to pursue such study into the realms of the excitingly
mimetic than into those of the constructively opaque and aesthetically
challenging. There is a limit to the fascination of life-like statues and trompe
l’oeil pictures and ingenious graphics. Or perhaps the point is rather that
fascination itself soon becomes wearisome to the practical consciousness.
Mitchell is well enough aware, as he puts it, ‘That the critical exposure and
demolition of the nefarious power of images is both easy and ineffectual’ (p.
35). While he is absorbed by the potential of images to enchant, to unsettle
and even to enrage, he surveys the excesses of iconoclasm and iconophilia
alike with a kind of wry detachment. (See, particularly, the chapter on
‘Offending Images’, with its discussion of the ‘Sensation’ exhibition at the
Brooklyn Museum in 1999.) Where works of art are concerned, however, he
displays a certain preference for those that display their technical ingenuity
in readily recoverable terms or that yield up their topicality – or in Gormley’s
case, their theatrical solemnity – without resistance. By the same token, he
seems uneasy with ‘high modernist’ abstract art (which he conceives of as
iconoclastic), and perhaps with any art that is virtually devoid of pictorial
content. The potential critical content of those assessments is not to be
deflected by the easy reproof that ‘There is nothing like popularity and
public approval to earn the scorn of an art world elite that thinks no serious
artist can make serious works for the masses’ (p. 269). It is no more true that
popularity is the only grounds on which the seriousness of a work might be
questioned than it is that unpopularity is a measure of seriousness. But
Mitchell’s is not a work of art history or of art criticism, nor does it pretend
to be. It would be quite unreasonable to derogate him for his relative
indifference to the highly specialized aspects of modernist art while
welcoming both the breadth of his regard over the large field of images and
the generosity of his advocacy in specific cases. The distinction between
‘artistic’ and ‘inartistic’ pictures is not one he is much concerned with. To
that extent, this book stands at the opposite academic pole to work such as
Richard Wollheim’s Painting as an Art (1990[1987]), though Wollheim also
has much to say about the relations between picturing and desiring.

The great strengths of What Do Pictures Want? lie in Mitchell’s careful teasing
at the taxonomies to which the study of pictures tends to be compliant, and
in the critical thought that he brings to topical concepts. The question his
title poses is at once an invitation to scan widely across the field of potential
objects and an intentional alternative to those anti-iconographical methods
of interpretation – central to the tradition of modernist criticism – according
to which content is inseparable from aesthetic value. Not that Mitchell means to reinstall iconography as a process of intransitive reading in the manner of Panofsky. The assurance of this is to be found in the implicit rider to his question: What is it that pictures want from us? 'The point . . . is not to install a personification of the work of art . . . but to put our relation to the work into question, to make the relationality of image and beholder the field of investigation’ (p. 49).

Clearly, if this manner of investigation is to prove critically effective, it will not do to hold up for scrutiny only those types and incidences of image–beholder relations that comport with our favoured self-images. Though one consequence of Mitchell’s approach is thus that nothing is to be held beneath regard, it is clear that his aim is not to level all pictures down to some common denominator. In a significant coda to the title essay, he expands on the situational implications of his question.

Who or what is the target of the demand/desire/need expressed by the picture? One can also translate the question: what does this picture lack; what does it leave out? What is its area of erasure? Its blind spot? What does the frame or boundary exclude? . . . What does it need or demand from the beholder to complete its work? (pp. 49–50)

Mitchell proceeds to demonstrate the relevance of these inquiries by addressing them to Velázquez’s Las Meninas, before concluding, ‘This is a picture that wants nothing from us while pretending to be totally oriented towards us’ (p. 50). The intriguing possibility thus raised is that perhaps what Mitchell’s proposed inquiry in the end offers us is a novel method of reaching the traditional and surely indispensable end of axiological (let’s say ‘aesthetic’) discrimination among comparable things.

The problem with the priority accorded to aesthetic response and evaluation in the modernist critical tradition lay in the tendencies it encouraged: on the one hand to favour those media that have traditionally fostered privilege and privacy in the relations between object and beholder; on the other to set aside the kinds of situational inquiry that serve to connect pictures to the world in which other things are made and consumed and other people are at work or at leisure. It is a corrective function of Mitchell’s exemplary question that it requires us in our approaches to pictures to keep this larger world of needs and desires in mind, and to admit its promptings into the act of criticism. On the other hand, though, he is prepared to allow that there are instances in which such considerations may in the end seem incidental – instances of works of art which appear ‘autonomous, self-sufficient, perfect, beyond desire’. ‘This may be the condition we attribute to pictures we think of as great works of art, and we might want to criticize it; but first we need to understand it as a logical possibility entailed by the very notion of a living thing beyond desire’ (p. 50).

What Do Pictures Want? concludes with a suggestion that the study of visual culture should be located ‘at the transitional points in the educational
process . . . at the introductory level, at the passageway from undergraduate to graduate education, and at the frontiers of advanced research’ (pp. 352–3). It would be a mistake to interpret this as implying that the position of visual studies is properly ancillary to established patterns of study in the humanities. On the contrary, Mitchell’s point is that visual studies ought at each stage to be seen as foundational, not simply given the ‘pictorial turn’ in contemporary culture for which he argued in Picture Theory, but because ‘there is no way of getting beyond pictures . . . to a more authentic relationship with Being, with the Real, or with the World’ (p. xiv). At the introductory level, he suggests, visual studies would replace ‘what we used to call ‘Art Appreciation’” (p. 352). The point is telling. The protocols of art appreciation were based on the assumption of an essentially intransitive relationship between spectator and object. One knew what was to be appreciated: a more-or-less established canon of special things; and one knew what appreciation meant: it meant learning how to be in command of such things – that is to say how to make reference to them without risk of social embarrassment. In visual studies as ideally conceived – and as and when somehow made practical – the relationship between object and spectator is fully transitive and always open to question. The principal relevance of the canon is that it motivates inquiry into the mechanisms of canonization. As to ‘appreciation’, it is merely one among a range of performances that may be elicited by a given image from amongst the universe of images that constitute our ‘reality’. If there is one truth to be appreciated, it is that we are never in command of the desires that pictures represent or ‘have’, either in our ways of talking and writing about them, or in our unverbalized responses. If we were, their interest would be soon exhausted, and we would have no need to make more.

References


Charles Harrison


One of the central problems of and for representation is materiality, the physical constitution of the image by and as actual matter. Whether effaced or exaggerated, compliant or resistant, matter must be negotiated in creating
a two – or three – dimensional visual representation. In his study of the emergence and art-theoretical complexity of modern art, David Peters Corbett demonstrates how artists in England focused on the relationship between materiality and image as the site of their investigations into ‘the capacity of the visual to comprehend the world and reveal its realities’ (p. 6). In 19th-century England, the status of vision was under revision and pressure, and Corbett demonstrates how painters reconsidered their own praxis and theory in hopes of positioning painting in relation to the rapidly changing conditions of modernity. Specifically, scientific developments increasingly cast doubt on unaided vision’s ability to apprehend the complexity of the world. Microscopes and telescopes revealed a reality far more extensive than the eye alone could see, and science cast human vision as unpredictable, limited, and mediated. Painters and critics resisted such positivistic accounts of vision, arguing that the creation and experience of the visual nevertheless offered a distinct and useful form of knowledge. Corbett historicizes this investigation, focusing on the painted surface as the arena in which succeeding generations of painters and critics debated art’s function. He argues that they attempted to characterize the manipulation of paint on canvas as a means toward a potentially unmediated, direct way of considering the world (or at least one’s visual experience of it). However Sisyphean the historic goal of ‘unmediation’ turned out to be, it nevertheless provides Corbett’s argument with a convincing catalyst (even if, at times, as a site of resistance) for art-theoretical advances in English art across the period from the Pre-Raphaelites to Vorticism.

The idea that painting might be able to present a sort of direct, unmediated experience of the visual itself allows Corbett to discuss, in his first chapter, the dual use of images and language in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, focusing on the changing responses to this issue from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Edward Burne-Jones. In his second chapter, he links this drive to unmediation to Aestheticism, demonstrating how artists such as Frederic Leighton and James McNeill Whistler developed the idea of ‘art for art’s sake’ into a formulation of divergent theories of pure painting as offering a distilled brand of visual knowledge and experience. He concludes that Whistler, in particular, makes central the role of the artist in processing and repackaging the visual experience of modern life. Whistler’s bravura use of pigment, often with the suppression of recognizable content, become in Corbett’s analysis an example of attempted control of the modern world through the medium of paint. In this formulation, the artist’s persona becomes the filter through which the world is transformed into a direct, visual experience, metaphorically located in the materiality of paint on canvas in excess of representation. This focus on the filtering aspect of the artist’s persona leads Corbett to discuss Charles Ricketts and Oscar Wilde in the one chapter that seems the least consistent in the book. It is the only chapter not to deal with paintings, focusing instead on Wilde’s writings and Ricketts’ illustrations of them, and its argument, however interesting, seems tangential in many respects. It does, however, provide a tenuous link between the arguments built around Aestheticism and the hero of Corbett’s
story, Walter Sickert. In Sickert, Corbett finds a painter who more fully embraces the materiality of paint while using it to tackle the subject matter of modern life. He sees in Sickert’s surfaces a concordance of representation and materiality as well as a synthesis between certain aspects of Realism and Symbolism, revealing Corbett’s Sickert to be distinct from other versions of modern painting, both in England and elsewhere. The indiscernibility central to Sickert’s representations (both in terms of their mimesis and their subject matter) becomes the problem and promise of paint as an alternate form of knowledge more broadly. The concluding chapter is a wide-ranging and masterful analysis of Vorticism and its rivals as coping with the legacy of these issues, from Wyndham Lewis’s reaction against facture to a refreshing analysis of Spencer Gore as paradigmatic of the issues of modern art in England before the Great War.

As he moves between the long-term debates about the roles of visuality and painting, Corbett isolates a heretofore under-acknowledged discursive lineage about the efforts to make art modern in England. As the brief summary of its contents no doubt indicates, The World in Paint is, consequently, a difficult book containing both historical and theoretical acuity alongside occasional moments of over-reaching. At certain points, especially in the opening chapters, the issues around which Corbett circulates are elusive to the point of indiscernibility. (Most unfortunately, this is the case with the anecdote that introduces the book.) The central themes of his argument nevertheless emerge clearly and coherently when the book is taken as a whole. In fact, it is the progressive force of Corbett’s hypothesis that one might see as one of the few negative traits of this book. Despite the heterogeneity of the case studies that make up The World in Paint, the overall argument betrays a teleological ordering that privileges the issues that surround Sickert’s work and, with them, that most canonical of modernist criteria – the abandonment of strict verisimilitude. The early chapters, on the Pre-Raphaelites, Aestheticism, and Ricketts and Wilde, only truly come into focus after we reach Sickert and his bolder display of facture and materiality as painting’s potential. Overall, Corbett’s claims for paint’s ability to provide a site for the investigation into visuality are strongest when he deals with painters who allow the materiality of paint to contribute to or to interfere with representation. This in no way mitigates the accomplishment of the book. It does, however, mean that it is best read as a whole rather than piecemeal.

This is a relatively minor issue, one which is easily overshadowed by the significant methodological and historiographic advance Corbett’s analysis contributes to the study of art in Britain. The World in Paint reconsiders the trajectory of art’s relationship to modernity from the mid 19th century to the First World War, remapping the allegiances and affinities that have often gone uninvestigated. Corbett’s case for the complexity and variety of modern art in England is convincing and nuanced, but we would be mistaken if we took The World in Paint to be a book just about English art. Rather than being the kind of reactive revisionist book in which the author merely clamours at the gates of the canon, Corbett offers the subtler and
ultimately more challenging possibility of reconsidering the definitions of modern art and the methods used to study it from the unexpected but by no means impoverished perspective of art in England.

English art of the 19th and 20th centuries suffered from a set of historiographic prejudices in the discipline of art history. English art was perennially denigrated as being inherently derivative, late, or reactionary in comparison with the more well-worn tales of the birth and flowering of modern art in France. The canon of acceptable and benchmark artists in that dominant narrative remained more or less intact as the predominant methodologies of art history shifted from the connoisseurial to the contextual, both of which located transhistoric value (even if implicitly) in the relation of these works to a presumed evolution of modernist abstraction and/or social engagement. Works of modern art were identified by their relationship to this progress, and that which could not be easily seen as morphologically related to that evolution became more or less invisible in the taxonomy. (One can think of the ongoing difficulty some have had with considering Surrealism ‘modern’ because of some of its practitioners’ ‘return’ to illusionistic styles of painting.) Under the influence of this evolutionary perspective, supporters of English art in the 20th century often chose to cling, almost fanatically, to those moments when art and artists seemed to rival or at least approach the modern art central to the dominant art-historical narratives. Depending on who was doing the writing, the heroic figures came from Bloomsbury, Vorticism, Unit One, and so on, and they were set in stark contrast to the rest of artistic production in England which was caricatured as conservative, prudish, or merely unsophisticated. Advocates of suitably ‘modern’ English art paradoxically incorporated and implicitly reiterated the bias from mainstream narratives and deployed it, sometimes tyrannically, in parsing out the worthy from the unworthy.

Corbett’s book, however, does much more than paint a picture of English modern art to be proud of. He tackles the important tasks of reconsidering how we recognize ‘modern’ art and how we tell its histories. Corbett shows how stylistically divergent positions can be understood to be arising from shared, foundational issues, thus opening up the modernist taxonomies to alternative, though no less historically crucial, criteria. Surveying a period of more than a half-century of technological and social transformations, Corbett asks the pressing question of how the potentially outmoded practice of making painted images continued to find a place. By examining the discourses of visuality and the struggle with materiality, his book offers a set of analyses that prompt us not just to look at art in England with a more precise eye but also to consider more broadly how visuality interfaces with cultural modernity. He demands that we attend to the specific instances when they were negotiated in art and criticism, and his examinations of texts and paintings are composed of a wealth of detailed observations that cumulatively exemplify the importance of close, sustained looking and reading as fundamental tools for historical analysis. The smallest detail, he demonstrates, can sometimes reveal epochal concerns.
Corbett’s tactics are deftly deployed, but they remain, however, a risky gambit. No doubt, some readers are bound to make accusations of ‘formalism’. In the wake of contextual approaches to the history of art, a broad and often inaccurate notion of ‘formalism’ continues to be bandied about as art history’s Scarlet Letter. This is especially the case for the study of art in England, in which many revisionist histories attempt to justify English art solely in terms of the social and political context of late-Victorian or pre-War England. While it is hoped that such an approach will establish the value of English art, such singularly contextualizing approaches merely reinforce its marginality in terms of wider issues for art history – even as these revisionist accounts seek to prove that English culture offers a rich and complex field of inquiry (something historians of English literature have been able to repeatedly discuss without relegating their objects of study merely to illustrations of a context). Moving out of this impasse, Corbett demonstrates that the close attention to artworks, their representational strategies, and their material constitution is not the same as the ahistorical practice of abjuring content to focus solely on form. The World in Paint charts a discourse of the visual within art theory and practice and links it to wider issues for cultural modernity and social history without making it subservient to them. In so doing, it offers a model for understanding the detail and complexity of modern art.

Note
1. In this aim, Corbett’s book is part of a larger trend in recent art-historical writing to re-evaluate the position and theories of modern art in England across both the 19th and 20th centuries. See my literature review essay (Getsy, 2001) for a discussion. Since then, a number of other books have been published in this vein, including Corbett et al. (2002), Helmreich (2002), Huneault (2002), McConkey (2002), Fletcher (2003), Holt (2003), Wolff (2003), Getsy (2004a, 2004b), Reed (2004), Malvern (2004), Barringer (2005) and Barlow (2005). There are also articles too numerous to cite here that reflect this historiographic development, but of note are Prettejohn (2002), Tickner (2002), Nead (2004) and Peters Corbett (2005).

References


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[Chorus] And I would walk five hundred miles And I would walk five hundred more Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles To fall down at your door. More on Genius. About "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" is a song by The Proclaimers that was released in 1988. It is their most popular song. In 1993 it reached No. 3 in the US Billboard. Written By Craig Reid & Charlie Reid. Recorded At.