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**Making Meaning through Movement:
Hiking the Cathar Trail in the South of France**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how meaning is formed through movement. It argues that the way in which hikers perceive, experience and make sense of their environment is contingent on their movement. Specifically, it explores walkers' lived experiences and perceptions of their environments on a long-distance hiking trail. The thesis is based on participant observation on the Cathar Trail in the south of France in 2013 and on archival research. The Cathar Trail lends itself to such an investigation because it invites visitors who are intent on hiking and on the history of the Cathars, a persecuted thirteenth-century religious minority. To interrelate processes of interpretation and interaction in an anthropological perspective, I adopt a phenomenological approach and Ingold's (2000a) ecological approach to human-environment interaction in combination with interdisciplinary and interpretative approaches.

The thesis situates hikers' journeys in socio-political and geographical contexts by deconstructing the twentieth-century historical narratives, heritage discourses and sites (ruined fortresses) which are the basis of the Trail. I then show that hikers came to know the Trail through their physical engagement with their environments. To highlight that walkers' environment-related movement was constitutive of their sense of place, I propose the holistic concept of *terroir* as an alternative to 'landscape'. My discussion of wayfinding demonstrates that hikers made their own way, shaped by movement, topography, sensory perception, technologies and other hikers. I show that walking the Cathar Trail produces a knowledge particular to people's bodily movement along a path and to histories.

Crucially, I develop the theory of a hiking spatiality which is generated by, and specific to, hikers' movement along the Trail. Locally specific but encompassing in its scope, the thesis seeks a common ground in movement. Throughout, I use photographs to engage the reader through intimated and intuited bodily experience. Interweaving epistemology and methodology, the thesis is at one and the same time about meaning-making in movement and is in itself a form of knowledge formed from movement (in particular through the employed 'walking-with' method) according to a research agenda.

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GLOSSARY

Association des Sites du Pays Cathare The Association of the Sites of the Cathar Country. A collective organised around central sites (*sites pôles*) of the Cathar Country.

CDR *Comité Départemental de Randonnées* The County Hiking Committee, designer of the Cathar Trail. Later integrated into the FFRP.

CDT *Comité Départemental du Tourisme* The tourism committee of the county.

Conseil Général de l'Aude The General Council of Aude.

Département A smaller administrative division of France than 'region', comparable to a 'county'.

FFRP *Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre* The national French Hiking Federation.

GR *Grande Randonnée* A hiking trail which belongs to the national network of long-distance footpaths owned and run by the FFRP.

A note on translation: Throughout the thesis I have translated into English direct quotes from participants as well as all passages from archival material and from sources listed in another language than English in the Bibliography.

