This is the first of two Things from the Sea collected in October 2014 at the Third Biennial BABEL meeting, On the Beach. This first thing, Walk on the Beach, catalogues the Material Collective’s session+flash-exhibition, an experiment in collecting and curation. The next thing, Sea Monsters, will include the papers from the session “The Nature of the Beast/Beasts of Nature: Monstrous Environments.”

Walk on the Beach began with conversations about the sea, collaborative meditations on chance, discovery, agency, beauty, and material ecology. We talked about the fraughtness of home and of coming to be there, the confluence of the personal and the professional, the delicate care of treading the world, and the possibilities of storytelling. We thought about what happens when we encounter stuff, when we take it, change it, do something with it. When we display it, or sculpt it, or collect it. When we make some thing an object, and an object of looking.

Then we met on the beach. We walked and talked about loss, home, agency, and liminality, we collected things: we picked up stones, feathers, seaweed. We pointed to stuff, gathered it, let it strike our fancy. Every shell nurtured a conversation among artists, scientists, historians, poets, archivists, surfers, philosophers, and pirates. We brought the sea-things back, manipulated them, and displayed them as works of art.

Walk on the Beach is a souvenir of that project, a record of our bounty. It also exposes a process that is at the heart of art historical work: close looking. Thinking through objects, thinking with objects. Letting the things help us to tell their stories. This tiny collection immerses us in the visual and the material and the process of looking, together.

—Maggie M. Williams and Karen Overbey
At the margin between the infinite expanse of oceanic consciousness and the materiality of the shore, the walking human is an embodied hinge.
An image (?) of water-lines in sand