

Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, eds., *Ways of walking: Ethnography and practice on foot*. Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008.

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This edited volume is a collection of essays on 'ways of walking', as practised both by ethnographers/geographers/architects and many pastoralist and hunter-and-gatherer groups around the world. In the case of the professionals, walking is a means of doing research; in the case of indigenous people, it is an important everyday subsistence practice. The collection is based on papers presented at a three-day workshop on 'walking' in Aberdeen in 2005. The editors, who are also authors in this volume, work from the epistemological assumption that the world is socially produced. Through foregrounding the topic of 'ways of walking', one that is often relegated to footnotes or to short sections on methodology in most academic texts, the authors aim to explore the creative processes that 'brings objects into being' (p. 1). The stated aim of the editors then is to move beyond the traditional focus in making academic writing on what is being done (*content*) to how that is being done (*process*). Examining the footnotes of methodology so to speak, and the footprints of 'having been there', would, they contend, illuminate something more than just our physical bodies. Paying respect to the lineage lines of Mauss and Bourdieu, the editors can indeed say in their introduction, echoing the title of Mandela's autobiography, that 'Life itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live' (p. 1).

The introduction is no more than an overview of the following chapters and as such gives us little insight into the initial thinking behind the calling of the workshop. What it does do, even if not through the short introduction, is to speak to recent theoretical considerations of the body as a mere symbol or site or signifier, perhaps born out of a frustration with overly linguistic approaches to culture, and a refusal to see the body only in linguistic terms. But there is no one theoretical line being argued for in the collection and it contains a diversity of pieces and approaches to the topic. Below I briefly discuss a few of these contributions.

In chapter 2 Tuck-Po Lye takes the reader on a fascinating excursion through her ethnographic descriptions and footnotes of the 'phenomenology of walking for the Batek'. This is an account of walking with a group of Batek hunters-gatherers in Malaysia, who are lowland peoples living close to Malay villages where supplies can be bought and where they can find temporary sources of employment. She does well not to paint an artificial picture of a pristine, isolated group of hunter-and-gatherers; her ethnographic descriptions are littered with references to contact, both historical (slave trade) and contemporary (tourist walking trails and encountering tourists as she walks with the Batek). It seems that the Batek do a lot of walking and so did Lye: during fifteen and a half months of fieldwork between 1995-6 she moved residential locations 80 times (averaging six days per location), and whilst living among a Batek group she stayed in 32 different campsites and two settlements (averaging two weeks per

location). While the forest was an 'other-place' to her, Batek approached the forest without such fears. While they were scared of 'Malay madmen' wondering the forests, which in all likelihood stems from a history of slave-trading during which forest-people were raided by people of lowland polities, the Batek approached the forest with both fear and confidence. It is a fascinating account of walking with a group of hunters-and-gatherers, experienced by means of living and walking with and listening to their stories: 'Talking and walking are inseparable [for the Batek] ... If walking creates the path and if walking itself is an act of sociality, then can the path have any meaning without the stories of the people using it? ... Paths are social phenomena, and are remembered in relation to social events' (p. 26).

In her contribution Alice Legat writes about the links between story-telling, walking and learning among a group of the Dene (or Athapaskan-speaking people) of north-western Canada, currently making a living between the Great Slave and Great Bear lakes in the Canadian Northwest Territories. She worked on a project which had the aim of documenting 'local Dene knowledge' for the purposes of resource management and self-government. She came to see the links between 'walking stories', 'leaving footprints' and experiencing place as a form of validating 'walking stories'. Dene children grow up listening to stories about walks and paths; 'relations with places are initiated as soon as children first hear the narratives' (p. 36). As they grow older they get to walk these very same paths they had heard of through stories: 'the period between listening to stories and walking them marks an in-between phase of learning during which people who have heard 'talk' do not yet know the 'truth' or reality of a narrative' (p. 37). This direction of thinking allows Legat to describe walking as 'the experience that binds narrative to the acquisition of personal knowledge' (p. 35), as the practice that 'validates the reality of the past in the present' and by so doing 're-establishes the relation between place, story and all the beings who use the locale'. Those interested in the burgeoning field of the 'anthropology of learning' will find her chapter useful, as she manages to link these to a broader field: 'Listening to stories and following the footprints of those [Dene] who are more knowledgeable allows one to think by drawing on philosophical understanding and practical knowledge that originated in the past. This is a perspective that encourages everyone [among the Dene] to acknowledge that there is much to learn' (p. 39).

The contribution by Thomas Widlok is a curious one; retaining the rather Eurocentric view that the discipline of social anthropology deals with cultural difference and describing it as a European project. In it Widlok aims to compare the 'ways of walking' of two groups as they traverse, or used to traverse, the arid landscape of northern Namibia. The one group is the San (the collective 'Bushmen of southern Africa' who walked for their livelihood) and the other is members of the confluence movement (members of 'a subculture within a subculture' whose favourite leisure time activity is walking with the aid of GPS technology and communicating this to an internet community (pp. 51-2). 'Confluencers' are the members of this Confluence movement and their aim is to visit each of the latitude and longitude integer degree intersections in the world and to take pictures at each location. How one can compare such disparate groups (in time and space) without even a mention of the political economy that enables such modern-day Columbus types to walk Africa for fun remains unclear. The comparative statements that Widlok produces are also not clear:

‘... there is a limit to the degree of control that road-makers can exert over people’s movements. The presence of roads (or well-trodden paths more generally) is both an attraction and a disincentive, not only for confluencers and committed outdoor enthusiasts but also for ‘San’ and others who walk the land in daily routines of making a living and of getting around. Both groups have to face the fact that simply by using a route they cannot help but establish some sort of path or trail that others can then follow, or deliberately choose not to follow’ (p. 60). His notion of ‘path-dilemma’ – which refers to walking in the wild and ‘inheres in the way that one person’s opening of a path may, for others, effect a closure’ (p. 53) – seems to be a well sounding phrase for re-introducing rational choice theory as explanatory framework for understanding the walking choices people make. Widlok is clearly not ignorant of some of the postcolonial critiques of European anthropology – he even refers to them. But his failure to pay any attention to power, politics and privilege in his comparison of how these two ‘groups’ walk northern Namibia makes the comparison unsuccessful. As the only chapter in the book engaging with ‘Africa’, this is a disappointing contribution.

Pernille Gooch’s contribution tells the story of a group of *Van Gujjars* pastoralists in the Himalayas (known in the region as *ana-jana lok*, the ‘coming-going people’), and their buffaloes, as they walk the region for greener pastures. Unlike Widlok, she foregrounds the political economy of the region in her understanding of their ‘way of walking’. For the *Van Gujjars* walking is not a pastime; no, the bodily movement of ‘feet following hooves’ is their main technique of subsistence. But this technique has recently come under threat as physical barriers are erected on the landscape and as the state enforces its view of nomadism or ‘moving as a way of life’ as an abnormality. The *Van Gujjars* are also walking into discursive barriers as the discourse of environmental destruction – ‘devastated mountain landscape drifting rapidly towards irreversible destruction’ – blames the migratory herders for overexploitation of natural resources. In this highly politicised landscape, walking takes on a political dimension – ‘a resistance by moving feet and hooves’ (p. 79). While not everybody would swallow Gooch’s assertion that ‘Successful pastoralism demands a strong feeling of understanding between herders and the animals they herd, tantamount to a shared world-view, whereby the world can be perceived through the senses of the animals in question’ (2008: 73), it is clear that indeed ‘everyday walks of path and placemaking in forests and meadows, undertaken during winter and summer respectively, constitute tightly woven webs of capillary threads that are bridged by the arterial walk of transhumance’ (p. 71). Walking is about the last thing that keeps the *Van Gujjars* from sitting down (*beithna*), or from becoming like ‘stones that cannot easily be moved’ (p. 71).

Readers hoping for ethnographically-informed approaches to walking in urban landscapes should not bother to buy this book. The few urban case studies or chapters (by Lavadinho and Winkin on Geneva, Curtis on Aberdeen and Lucas on Tokyo) are tucked away in the back of the volume. Of these the one by architect Raymond Lucas is the most innovative and theoretically-inspired. ‘Getting Lost in Tokyo’ is a project based on the author’s observations of Shinjuku subway station in Tokyo in which he seeks to ‘generate new architectural spaces out of my experiences of a specific place and time’ (p. 170). Finding inspiration in early modernism, especially the figure of the *flâneur* in Baudelaire and Benjamin as the city dweller who actively and creatively

appropriates the landscape and life of the city as opposed to the passive consumer of the late modern city, Lucas drifted (from the notion *dérive* associated with the Situationist International) through the urban spectacle of Tokyo's Shinjuku station. Asking himself: How is it even possible to negotiate this place? What are the characteristics of the Tokyo subway? Lucas then started drifting counter to the flow of people in the place during rush hour and then reconstructing from memory his flow on a flowchart diagram. Through these diagrams he hoped to capture the journeys he made, exiting, changing lines and getting lost. A further complication was dividing the diagram into episodes and then presenting these in a system of notation used in dance choreography (Laban notation). Analysing these diagrams and notations threw up several recurring motifs, the results of which are reproduced in part in his chapter.

This volume would be of use to students of the 'anthropology of learning' and some of the chapters could be useful for their contributions to discussions of methodology and ethnographic practice. Scholars looking for a serious theoretical innovation on the topic of walking will not find it here; neither would scholars looking for a consideration of the ethnography of walking in Africa.