

WRITING THE WALKING

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I began my walking practice, unaware of the walking and the practice, as a classical dancer first. I was five years old. I was learning Kathak, a classical dance form largely native to the northern parts of India. I learnt to walk as Radha – the erotic divine feminine and as Krishna – the mischievous Divine. The child in me was unaware of the subjectivities being developed purely through the rhythm of walking. The 1,2,3 soft treads for the erotic feminine and the 1,2,3,4 – swifter, lighter and flighty for the mischievous Krishna. The first poem my body thus practiced was through walking as others, curiosity overwhelming empathy, enchantment of an imaginary terrain taking over. The rhythm of the body was not registered as its own – it was the rhythm of the others I was inhabiting. My body wrote other bodies through walking. Language was absent, gestures communicated instead. Silent rhythms were loud, performativity latent in them, even louder.

It was this performativity that found a voice in the Walking’s New Movement conference in Plymouth 2019, and then in the book today that we all have gathered to celebrate. Be it Sarah Scaife’s poetic reflections on her walks as generative of magical aesthetics or Iain Biggs idea on walking with trouble towards a deep mapping practice, the essays in the book “Walking Bodies” traverse a rich theoretical as well as historical topos through and upon which our understanding of walking as an act, concept and artifact has emerged. This wide-ranging topos is also very bravely explored by its associated forms of writing. Not confined to the academic essay format, the chapters in this book range from walking maps, instructions, reflections, poetry, and my own choreographic notation of a walking performance. This variety would not have been possible without Phil and Helen’s inspiring practice of walking and writing, and Andrew’s support at Triarchy Press. Thank you, both!

My own journey of walking – literally and performatively from the divine feminine to the Venusian storyteller and artist-scholar at Plymouth is not half as interesting as what I have learnt about walking in the last year when walking has become luxury, and crime. Walks themselves have been both written and unwritten, sometimes unwritable. As this distance grew, the mythogeography of my own walks – now made even more mythical by the presence of our differently-abled dog - began to perform itself autopoetically. Two humans and half a dog, with her wheel-chair and traumatized psyche from a vicious attack that broke her spine began to find ways to walk in a lockdown induced terrain. The eyes on the street were no longer available, and the walkness of our walk had to rely on more-than-physiological expressions. Our conversations with the dog, who is now fluent in “Dinglish”, performed her walks in the absence of a functioning spine and later on walkable hind-legs. She walks when we write her walks through

our bodies. Her body caged by her injuries, and ours caged by the responsibilities of full-time academic positions at university.

Walking performs better in Denglish – relishing the new language through which it can mythicize itself again.

The necessity of new myths, to imagine new futures – inclusive, just and safe futures; malleable, pliant and dynamic futures, futures that exist in the here and now, away from history – demands the emergence of new language systems. Languages which can craft new myths in service of such futures. That’s what makes this book as essential as the walks themselves. The performance of writing produces new myths in exactly the same manner as the walks produce new beings.

Thank you all again, and I hope you enjoy the evening planned ahead!