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## *Walk This Way*

Dee Heddon

My invitation to the ANTI Festival's 2009 Seminar, *Footfalls*, was a lovely mix of chance, coincidence and irony. As a regular attendee at the National Review of Live Art (NRLA), held annually in Glasgow over a number of years, I had inevitably rubbed shoulders with another regular attendee, Johanna Tuukkanen, Artistic Director of the ANTI Festival.<sup>1</sup> A defining feature of the NRLA was the long queues that formed outside of popular performances. At the NRLA 2008 I found myself standing next to Johanna in just such a queue. With lots of time to kill, and glasses of wine to drink, we shared notes on current projects. One of mine happened to be researching women artists who use walking as the primary material in their arts practice. And one of Johanna's was curating the 2009 edition of the ANTI Festival – on walking. At that moment – standing still in a very long queue, talking about walking – our paths crossed, a crossing that led me to the city of Kuopio. At the Festival's launch reception I discover that ANTI means GIFT in Finnish. I certainly felt like I was the recipient of an exceptionally generous gift; one that I have the privilege of unwrapping again here, as I travel down memory's lanes.

Over the course of a few days the ANTI Festival provides my orientation to Kuopio, a city I am visiting for the first time. I am reminded of Robert Newell's advice written in 1821, in *Instructions to Pedestrian Tourists*: 'The best way undoubtedly of seeing a country is on foot.' I don't disagree, but I might add another ingredient: a site-specific festival. What a wonderful way to discover a city – following a programme of site-specific works rather than a city map or guidebook. Artists' works, rich in their diversity, lead me up and down different streets, through underpasses, into shops and shopping centres and offices, down to the archipelago, and up to the forest that shelters the town. None of the work leads me on a wild goose chase since all of it engages my mind (intellect and imagination) and often my body too.

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... I accompany Regin Igloria up the steep hill to Puijo Ridge. I walk not only with Regin, but with other people I have never met before. All of us are there to support Regin in his 3-Day hike, each sporting for the occasion our own marathon bib numbers. Whilst Regin will repeatedly ascend and descend this hill over the duration of three days, I will do it only once. Back at base camp, a bit hot

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<sup>1</sup> I say 'inevitably' because unlike the ANTI Festival which is dispersed across the space of the city, the NRLA tended to be housed in a single space, creating a sort of 'hot house' atmosphere amongst the attendees – particular those who, like me, returned year after year.

and out of breath, my efforts are rewarded with an embroidered souvenir patch of Puijo Ridge ...

... I follow the three members of BodyCartography through the centre of the city, marvelling at the architectural shapes their bodies make against and within the fixed architectural structures of Kuopio. Some of the configurations are simple and perhaps all the more striking for it; a body dressed in a bright orange jacket lying horizontally across the bottom of a shop front, arms and legs extended, as if held up by the pavement; or a body rolling down a tarmac hill, as if it was a grass bank. Other postures are pleasurably other-worldly – a woman in green with the top half of her body encased in a large cardboard envelope. Called *Go*, it is only later that I realise the performers are dressed in red, orange and green ...

... I watch Adele Prince run repeatedly round a circuit that passes through H-Shopping Centre (*The Daily Commute*)... I watch Vincent Chevalier give himself *The Red Carpet Treatment*, unfurling and walking on a 2-metre length of red carpet over and over again; what price celebrity?... I watch my own avatar, created for Stephen Hodge's *SLaaristokaupunki*, walk through a digital space that looks something like the archipelago just outside the office windows ... I watch Gwendoline Robin turn herself into a terrifying, magic, human firework, her smoking, walking body trailing like a grounded rocket (*Walk #6899*)...

... I walk with Stephanie Nadeau, up and down a small patch of ground, walking a (shared) desire path into existence, an *Anonymous Collaboration*... I follow Tom Marshman around a department store, breathing in the cloying scents of perfumes, as Tom leads us on a *Sentimental Journey*, sharing confessions of personal experiences working on perfumery counters... I am guided by the wind thanks to the ingenious device built by Tim Knowles. For *Live Windwalks* I am instructed to follow the wind vane – a large white arrow – attached to a hard helmet, strapped on to my head. As the arrow turns, I turn too. I find myself stuck in a wind vortex, going round and round in circles, exploring in detail one very small corner of Kuopio; but I am not alone – Stephen Hodge is stuck in the same vortex. We do not break the rules. We stay there, turning and turning, until the wind decides it has tormented us enough and blows us in a new direction ...

... I navigate my way through the forest using Rachel Henson's flicker books (books of filmed images); the pictures provide a reassuring visual map – each frame of the book a freeze frame of the environment I stand in. Comparing photo with reality, I know I am on the right track. But almost imperceptibly, the

corresponding realities begin to crack, part, as a trickle of water shows up in one world but not the other; the trickle becomes a stream becomes a wave, becomes a sea – up here in the forest. Reality and fiction flicker, interchangeable, shifting; this forest through which I walk really is marvellous ...

... I walk... I talk... I laugh... I meet... I eat... I think... I look... I move... I am moved – to all sorts of places, in all sorts of ways, in all sorts of directions...

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I was standing in a queue in Glasgow, talking about walking. Now I am standing at the front of a very large auditorium in Kuopio, about to give my talk, 'Women Walking'. In front of me, a sea of faces. Actually, that's not quite accurate; the steep rake of the seating bank makes it look less like a sea and more like a mountain. The analogy is better because I know what to do with a mountain. I may feel small, and they may feel far away, but the distance can be shortened with a bit of effort. I take a deep breath and then I wave my arms: I can see you. Do you see me? We are here, we women walking.

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That was September 2009. In December 2009 I turned 40. My birthday present to myself was 40 walks with 40 friends. I am walking into my future. I hope I find my way back to Kuopio there.

<http://40walks.wordpress.com/>