



Nc

Footsteps¹

Andrew Moutu²

There are too many of them.
 Each with their own countless tales.
 Often, they are ahead of us, cutting a mark of separation.
 Delineating a trail, establishing a legacy or branding a reputation.

A good legacy creates a mountain of inspiration and a valley of emulation.
 A negative one is repulsive, it imposes caution and downright avoidance.
 They are ahead and around us.

You hear their sounds as they come into contact with a surface.
 Pitter-patter, tip-tap, cat-like, clacking, clackety-clack, squishing, thumping, thud
 Tip-toeing, walking, running, hopping, shuffling.

The one who sees a footprint or hears the sound of one is either in between or nearer to
 the other two.
 In time, there are footsteps that come after yours.

By the acoustic of its gaits, footsteps announce an imminent encounter.
 A lurking threat is exposed or a covert operation retreats with fleeting footsteps.

Footsteps are never alone, they always make one out of two.
 Each alternating foot is a step that births the next.

1 Editor's note: written on April 28, 2020, "Footsteps" was the answer given by Andrew Moutu, an anthropologist and writer born in Papua New Guinea, to the text "Reflecting back", written by Marilyn Strathern to compose the dossier "Aesthetics and the Amerindians, or Strathern in the Americas: ethnographic experiments with the shape of relations". Moutu wrote his poem before Strathern completed her article. Nevertheless, when he received from the latter the text she sent to Maloca, the author considered that his poem gave a *biographical form* to Strathern's elaborations, connecting it to those relationships that pair and that, in doing so, provoke movements and lines of thought and action. The poem is, in the terms in which Strathern used it to describe it, "an aesthetic response" to an "aesthetic exchange", evoking the two meanings of the term explored by her. Furthermore, the reciprocal between Strathern's text and Moutu's poem can be thought of as an experiment with the "wheel principle", as proposed by Roy Wagner in *An Anthropology of the Subject*.

2 Director of Papua New Guinea National Museum & Art Gallery and PhD in Anthropology, Cambridge University. E-mail: amoutu72@gmail.com





In their strides and straws, torque and phase, footsteps form a line ahead.
Much like a shadow outlined by the sun ahead of us.

Footsteps are not mere stamps that register the weight of a bipedal appendage.
Because they are made out of twos, footsteps are like wheels that leverage the world
outside of our bodies.
The bipedal laterality of footsteps brings the world close to us and we to the world.

We are a human wheel on a roll. Footsteps are the lateral sides of the wheel within us, the
ones before and after us.

In the theater of life, footsteps make us walk ahead or run in a concert, coalesce and
comingle, converge or diverge.

We digress at intersections and avoid or follow pathways carved out by the preceding
footsteps.

The lifetime of a generation is a hub of the wheel living it out in the signature of its
footsteps.

In reverberating the secret depths of being,

The sight and sound of footsteps are an epilogue to a life traversed but watched from the
humble lows of the heels ahead.