**THE GUIDED TOUR IN THE**

**UNDER-CELEBRATED URBAN SPACE**

BY

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis has developed from an interest in site-specific work and subsequently it has grown into a discussion about place, guided walks and the people who occupy spaces. The aim of the research is to examine the role of the audience in guided tours conducted within areas that are under-celebrated and degenerated. Using a performance walk as the practice to form part of my research, I pose the question; can audiences who are the local resident inform the content of the guided walk to reinforce a sense of community cohesion and celebration? Furthermore, can an area possessing no formal tourism infrastructure become a site for a community walk?

I will examine the role both space and the audience can play within guided tours in performance, particularly in those occupied by the local resident. This thesis relies heavily on the documentation material and reflective analysis from my own walk. Using this performance walk to form my argument, I also examine other walks and theories and investigate the strategies and processes of such walks. The thesis has reconsidered the trajectory of performance and guided walks and offers a different approach into how the local inhabitant can inform the content of walks, which are situated within their hometown.

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# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION - EXPERIMENTING WITH AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

This thesis is about creatively regenerating urban spaces through actively engaging its community members within under-celebrated and possibly neglected spaces within the urban suburbs of Birmingham. Moreover, it sets out to examine the potential benefits of working with communities to generate performance walks within these spaces. I begin with examining the traditional tour, the history of tour performance and theories of the city space. I am interested in what I will term socio-performance tours, and the implications of working with the everyday inhabitant in the under-celebrated space to create and generate these tours using real stories and memories that have been shaped through living in these areas, '[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identify will be a non-space' (Auge, 2008, p. 63). The notion of "non-space" is central to this thesis, which focuses on the guided tour in performance and how it can be translated to the under-celebrated urban space, or the neglected spaces, and the potential benefits of that. My thesis examines the use of the guided tour in the areas that are not, or are no longer, defined by historical importance or a concrete identity. This is not to suggest that they are non-places in the sense that they are insignificant, but rather forgotten about or never considered.

Peter Brook penned the phrase 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage' (1990, p. 1). This seemingly straightforward phrase could easily form the backdrop and the foundations to my thesis. Brook wrote his seminal book, *The Empty Space*, in 1968, a time when theatre radicals were deliberately moving away from bourgeois theatre and

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taking work to unexpected spaces, such as shops and warehouses. Site-specific (as we would term it today) work was developed in the 1960s as a way of bringing theatre to the everyday buildings and streets, in order to escape what was seen as the bourgeois decadence of the theatre and instead make art accessible. Artists working in this way were part of the avant-garde movement at that time, which '[p]romoted creativity as part of a wider cultural-political revolution' (Berghaus, 2005, p. 14).

The interest in site-specificity grew and artists have continued to produce work out of the theatre venues and in the public realm. Current artists working in the city space and disused buildings are doing so for many reasons - artistic choices, space limitations, financial restraints and the nineties saw a growing trend of socially engaged art, which invariably exists outside of the theatrical space. Theorists such as Shannon Jackson and Grant Kester explore artist's relationship to this practice in their texts *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2011) and *Conversational Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004). I use both of these texts to explore my own methodology alongside practitioners that seek to be socially engaged in their practice, as explored in chapter four.

The avant-garde artists of the 1960s laid the path for today's artists to explore the limitless spaces for theatre, however, it is less often explicitly for political reasons. A trend that grew out of site-specific work was to take performance onto the streets and create guided walks for performance, as I will be discussing in chapters one and two, with practitioners such as Janet Cardiff, Wrights and Sites and Graeme Miller. Such a move, I will suggest, has opened up new possibilities of exploring space and opens up

new debates about the function of the audience and space as art.

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My interest in space and trails began as an undergraduate at the University of Kent. I began exploring space for performative tours and the potential this has for the audience to explore spaces and concepts in a new light. The space I chose was a site that once hosted an old railway track, connecting Canterbury and Whitstable. The track itself had long gone and had been replaced with a walk comprising remnants of the railway along its route. One remnant was the railway tunnel that is situated in the university grounds. It was boarded up and covered in graffiti, which only added to its appeal and intrigue. The format of the piece was a guided tour, which explored the potential of both the human guide, and the audio guide. Each group member adopted the role of the expert guide and storyteller, having our own encounters with the audience members along the route, offering them embellished facts and stories of the area. We guided the audience along our chosen route and then we left them to their own devices as they picked up the pre-recorded audio guides to complete the tour.

This piece focused on recurring themes of loss and rejection, and personified the space rather than focusing on the industrial and economic significance as my future work would come to do. Albeit fascinating to research and develop, the piece did not hold personal resonance for me as it was in a location that I had no affiliation with, and therefore I felt disconnected from it. I felt that this would also be the case for the majority of the audience, being as they were made up of students and lecturers. It made me question the purpose of a guided tour and further still a guided tour in a performance context, the heightened self of the expert guide, playing her role for the tourists, and the

performative tour that subverts the use of the expert guide and the tourist attractions to fit into a new model. I became interested in how these were connected and how both formats borrow from each other. More specifically, I became concerned with space and the connections we have with places, and the potential impact this can have on an experience of a place that is made up of stories. These components of the guided tour and the guide became a focus of my thinking and I later began exploring it within a professional theatre context.

The first tour I conducted in the education field was in Stoke-on-Trent, entitled *Distant Earth* and it set out to explore the notion of space and how it can be used in a creative way, with a focus on the familiar. We used three different sites around Stoke-on-Trent, including an urban park, the local area to the school, including a working market and community church, and the town centre, including the Regent Theatre. A focal point for me as the maker of this piece was the role the audience/participants played, and I questioned this throughout the process and the delivery. Although the space and its function were important and at times crucial to the outcome of the project, the role the young audience played became integral to its shaping. They were not simply being guided along this trail, they were the ones that gave the trail its shape and its purpose, they were also local to the area, I was not, therefore I was aware of their relationship being familiar, whilst I had a working relationship with the chosen spaces. Without them the trail didn't exist, their presence was needed to devise and execute the piece. To fully submerge the children within this trail we gave them a role to suit the space and what it was symbolising. These included; an investigator, a time traveller, and an explorer. With these roles the participants believed in the adventure and engaged with

its aims. Each trail was set up with the idea that something had been stolen and it was the role of the children to discover who had stolen the object and why. Along the trail they met with various characters that gave them clues and insights into the space and who the potential criminal may be. Each site they visited was either transformed into a new site (such as a children's playground transformed into an alien aircraft) or reinforced (such as a story of a stolen script in the theatre). Through doing this the children were able to explore the site in a new way, they were not restricted to the function of the playground as merely a place for play, but instead they were able to view it in a new light and explore it as an imaginary place rather than what they were used to, its narrative was altered. Similarly with the theatre, this was a space that few had experienced, and those who had, had only seen it through one perspective, as an audience. Our trail allowed them access to the backstage areas, the dressing rooms, the rigging, and the stage. They were able to explore all spaces without fear of being reprimanded. These spaces exist in their hometown, to some extent they might be said to belong to them, but on the other hand they have restricted use of them, whereas this trail allowed them full rights to their spaces. An observation I made was that the children were aware of the spaces at all times, they observed them with open eyes and curious minds. As the piece was set up as crime scene, they believed whomever they saw on the streets that seemed to be acting against the norm, were part of the piece. This is what I find fascinating about the public space and performance tours – the everyday space becomes a playground and stage.

These projects set the basis for my thinking about the audience's engagement in the performative tour and the role they are asked to play. Without adult participants being

given a fictional role such as an explorer, they still play an active role that shapes the walk through their presence and physical movements through the spaces. It is this function that I will be re-examining in my analysis of the guided tour. This research will take this idea further and examine if there are benefits for the participants having an active role in the development of the piece from the outset. I will explore this idea through an analysis of existing practice and by reflecting on the outcomes of a guided walk I conducted with participants, entitled *Swanning Around Erdington.* The title derives from a local market named "Swannies", and I wanted to play on the local terminology to reinforce both the location and the intimacy of the stories.

In Chapter One I begin by looking at the traditional guided tour, which is often conducted in the spaces that are known by many, hosting famous landmarks and boasting colourful histories. Tourists flock to these places to experience and see the place for themselves. Performance tours can often take the same format, perambulating through spaces of potential interest. However, this idea has been subverted in recent years and more companies are embarking on theatrical tours that take their audience to the unexpected, to places of 'insignificance', or that appear unremarkable, as I will consider in detail in Chapter one, with performance artist, Janet Cardiff. As it is becoming more common for these places to be interrogated through a performative context, I believe that more questions need to be asked about the ownership of these places, and the role of those who inhabit, rather than visit them. My thesis will not only explore the notion of the guided tour in performance but also more significantly focus on ways in which the inhabitants of a given space can help to shape those stories, given that they are inextricably linked to the city/town.

Further still within chapter one through following existing models and adapting and applying certain principles and strategies, I shall reinvestigate the idea of the guided walk and how it can be challenged as a means to include local and everyday stories. The word tour implies a journey, through any space, not simply a site that is deemed attractive or culturally relevant, and I will draw on the extended definition of this term.

Within Chapter Two the concept of the audience will be analysed, I will focus on their fundamental role and how this too can be subverted in the context of a performance tour. As I discussed, the performance tour in the under-celebrated area has the potential for the audience to become actively involved in its shaping. This is something that will be explored in this thesis, as I believe it can have a significant cultural impact on disaffected areas. The audience will be examined with a focus on how they read the neglected or under-celebrated sites, and without the famous landmarks and rich history, I will ask what it is that we begin examining.

Within chapter three I examine how spaces can be re-claimed, drawing on practices and urban geographers who explore this notion, such as Quentin Stevens and David Crouch. Stevens draws on the street as a place of play and Crouch explores how the people that occupy places inherently project life into them.

Within Chapter four I will discuss, reflect on and analyse my guided walk, *Swanning Around Erdington.* With this walk I fused together my research pertaining to traditional and performative-guided walks, and my artistic vision of creating a walk, which responded to both the site and local residents, culminating in a hybrid practice. Here I will refer to both dialogical and socially engaged art, both of which employ the strategy of participation and inclusivity. I will be exploring this notion in my thesis to develop

an area of study which asks how space can be exploited in a performative tour context

as a way to empower inhabitants of under-celebrated, or neglected areas.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE GUIDED TOUR

### 1.1: Tourism and the spectacle

Tourism relies on spectacle as John Urry discusses in his book, *The Tourist Gaze,* (2002). He examines the tourist spots of England and states that,

> Tourism has always involved spectacle. Resorts in England have […] competed with each other to provide visitors with the grandest ballroom, the longest pier, the highest tower, the most modern amusement park, the most stylish holiday camp, the most spectacular illuminations, the most beautiful gardens, the most elegant promenade, and so on. Because of the importance of the visual, of the gaze, tourism has always been concerned with spectacle […] (Urry, 2002, p. 78).

The urge to draw in tourists is achieved through a visual appeal, each place boasting a landmark of sorts that will be the main draw for visitors. As Urry discusses, because tourism involves spectacle there is a certain amount of expectation and ideal of what a particular area should look like and possess in order to be acknowledged as a tourist site. Places become concepts, marketed with the ideal in mind, all attempting to attract an influx of tourists. Urry further explains that, '[w]hat people "gaze upon" are ideal representations of the view in question that they internalise from postcards and guidebooks.' (2002, p. 78). Through internalising the idealistic view of a place, we disallow ourselves to fully experience it. In *Swanning Around Erdington* I subverted the importance of the visual and the iconic by creating a tour that sought to draw on the familiar, but unremarkable, places and spaces in a suburb of Birmingham, which is not on any tourist map**.** Ultimately, the focus relied on the town, rather than the city; my distinction being that the city space is geared more towards tourism whereas the town is a functional space. The reliance on the functionality rather than the spectacle of place

became an integral part to the narrative, as I will fully discuss in chapter four, which draws on my field work, interviews I conducted, and site visits I did to generate the walk.

**1.2: The subverted guided tour**

As Gregory Ashworth and Stephen J. Page claim, tourists visit cities for the following reasons, '[…] 'sightseeing', 'wandering about', 'taking in the city', 'getting among the people'. This seemingly serendipitous behaviour may reflect some key elements of the urban in urban tourism motives and activities' (2011, p. 7).

Often the typical tourist is in search of moulding the mythology of a place into a reality of facts, and the other is in search of new information and insight into an *unfamiliar* area, and this is often achieved through the guided tour. These invariably exist in areas that have historical reference points, they are popular among those seeking to bring some temporary attachment to the city, and this is often achieved through the use of the expert guide and the guided tour. The guided tour is not limited to tourism, in recent years there has been a significant development in theatre makers using the idea of a guided walk to take an audience on a physical journey of a place. This has developed into a form of live art, with some purporting to be socially engaging as explored by Claire Bishop, an art historian who has written extensively on spectatorship. She breaks down her collection of essays in *Participation* (2006) that respond to the ever changing and developing landscape of contemporary art into three sections. Section one provides "theoretical frameworks" for how to consider participation; section two comprises "artist's writings", featuring artists reflecting on their work, and finally section three draws on a selection of "curatorial and critical positions" in which theorists respond to

art work that places itself within the remit of relational or participatory art.

There are a number of remodels of the guided tour with which I can begin, such as Wrights and Sites, Forced Entertainment and Janet Cardiff, who have created walks/tours that bring in the format of the guided walk with performative aspects. They are both inherent to the space they've been created in, and important to this practice. Within their work they have become concerned with the mapping of space and the identity of space/place. Forced Entertainment used the format of a guided tour on a bus in their piece *Nights In The City* (1995). Liz Tomlin's paper *Postmodern Tourism and the Performance Trap* (1999) discusses this tour. She notes how it parodied the expert guided tour and tour guide through deliberately getting lost and pointing out non-existent monuments, directing the audience to imagine known monuments within Europe. They also purposely entered areas that are run down, such as the Manor (an estate in Sheffield). As these culturally neglected areas are the ones I am interested in working in, I will address this aspect of the tour and discuss whether they, as Tomlin discusses, hold any ethical implications.

As Tomlin argues there are certain areas that need to be addressed when creating a tour performance where the line between the spectator and the unwitting performer is potentially crossed, '[t]he political implications of the performative status imposed on the inhabitants of the city; and the power dynamic between watching and watched, authoring and authored' (1999, p. 137). This is crucial to my argument, as I am keen to interrogate the role of the spectator within this format of performance, creating synergies between making and seeing work. As Tomlin states there are ethics involved when working in areas when the spectatorship is blurred. To become voyeurs as a

spectator or to be watched in one's own private, residential area presents a potential ethical dilemma. I am keen to explore the boundaries between the right of the artist to create work in public spaces and the right to retain one's anonymity. There is a separation between the public street and a residential area and as Tomlin points out in her paper,

> As the people on the streets became unwitting material for the mythical representations that populated Etchell's text, they were incorporated into the action not as individuals, but as a part of the "public" city. They were anonymous due to their number and their location, passing through streets where people worked, or shopped, or visited; streets of which ownership could never be claimed; streets that, in effect, welcomed native and visitor alike, and had no reason to distinguish between them (1999, p. 141).

The "performers", as the city itself, presented a backdrop to the text and heightened the humour or context of the piece. They occupied a public space and were not, individually or personally being singled out. However, this only formed part of the tour, and when the tour bus entered a residential area, that is, as Tomlin states, owned by the residents, it is their space that was scrutinised and parodied for audience comfortably hidden away from the reality of the estate. This is where anonymity was arguably taken away from the residents, as they became the performance. I am addressing the notion of participation throughout my thesis and suggesting that instead of parodying these areas and driving through them on a tour bus, that they can be used as the chosen site, with the residents involved in creating the work, thus having authorship instead of being objectified. Through their process, Forced Entertainment, as Tomlin argues, '[…] silenced any potential voices from the Manor by speaking in their place' (1999, p. 147). The physical barrier of the bus, voyeuristically passing through and not interacting with the residents all contributed to the silencing of them. Although the residents were not intended to be audience, my argument is that their role should have been reconsidered in

order to give the residents a voice.

In relation to the contemporary strand on the audience debate, I refer to Jacques Rancière, who discusses the politics of art in his manifesto concerning the spectator. A philosopher and critical theorist of politics and aesthetics, Rancière is a key figure in the debate regarding the role of audience in contemporary work. *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) seeks to question the role of the audience within the creation of an artwork, paying particular attention to the politics of art.

Rancière sums up his theory of emancipation through stating that, '[a]n emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators' (2009, p. 22). He proposes that spectators are politically and socially informed and aware, and therefore capable of commenting and interpreting what is witnessed. The politics of this rests in the idea that artists can no longer rely on creating autonomous work, for its meaning can be (re)interpreted by those who view it.

Rancière explores the idea of theatre revisiting a place of question, comment and community. Rancière believes that theatre once created works that allowed the above factors to take place and he believes that in order to return, theatre must once again be a place that allows questions to be asked and comments to be made. The emancipation of the spectator places them at the heart of the theatre work and allows the audience to become active investigators and explorers of the work. Rancière's argument is substantiated by the claim that viewing is also an action, as through this act, one '[o]bserves, selects, compares, interprets' (2009, p. 13) what is being witnessed. Claire Bishop references Rancière's argument and notes that, '[…] emancipation should rather be the presupposition of equality: the assumption that everyone has the same capacity

for intelligent response to a book, a play or a work of art' (2006, p. 16). This presupposition was denied to the residents of the Manor in *Nights in the City,* disallowing any response due to the barrier of the bus.

Even though *Nights in the City* was placed within the public realm, various factors seemed to deliberately exclude any participation that could have potentially steered the project in a direction that gave the inhabitants a voice with regards to the text, but instead as Tomlin states, '[…] such self-authorship was denied to those who remained unaware of the performance event that was taking place' (1999, p. 144). She goes on to note that this then becomes, '[…] in danger of merely replicating the exploitative practices of postcolonial tourism' (1999, p. 136). Through generating material for my practice as research I was aware of these issues, and I needed to find a balance between those who were contributing, that they were not simply being authored by me, but were authoring the piece. I did not want to speak in the place of someone who was sharing a story, but on the other hand I would inevitably put in place devices to make the text flow more smoothly, or embellish it.

In relation to positive reinforcement of active involvement of citizens, Frances Ravensbergen and Madine VanderPlaat discuss its importance and development in their paper, 'Barriers to citizen participation: the missing voices of people living with low income' (2009)

> This article reflects the involvement of people living with low income in the discourse and decision-making on issues related to poverty. It reports on the process and outcomes of a 1-year project, developed by KAIROS1 aimed at identifying tools, strategies, and policies to increase the participation and engagement of people living in poverty in order to help reduce and eliminate poverty in Canada. (Taken from abstract - http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org/content/45/4/389.abstract)

Drawing on their findings from the project, they discuss how research has shifted in recent years and how '[s]ince the mid-1960s, the value of experiential knowledge has increasingly been recognized as a valid and a valuable resource for decision-making and social action' (2009, p. 390). This change suggests that it should also allow a power shift, but it is the people who live in the areas of low income who have the least power over the social action that Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat refer to, this is reflected in the writings of Michel de Certeau (1984) who states that '[…] walkers […], whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it' (1984, p. 93). De Certeau's theory of ownership of space plays a key role in this thesis, as I will fully explore later in this chapter.

Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat further claim that the shift from, '[…] "scientific" solutions to social problems in part, arose from the perceived inadequacy of "expert" responses to the war on poverty, coupled by a growing sense of competence and desire for self-determination in lay communities' (2009, p. 390). I am keen to explore if this desire is enough to bring about social change. Arguably, the real power still lies within the town planners and as Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat discuss, '[t]here may be considerable reluctance to engage with those in power who, as agents of the welfare state, have such control over so many aspects of everyday life' (2009, p. 392). There is a huge divide between the citizen and the person in power – so the question remains, how is this power shifted? If the way in which the council approaches communities has changed to acknowledge a social problem, rather than a scientific discourse, then how is the power shifted from the government to the everyday citizen, or at least collaboration that is actively inclusive and gives a voice to the inhabitant? David Harvey (2008) argues that, '[t]o claim the right to the city in the sense I mean it here is to claim some

kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization […] Urbanization has always

been […] a class phenomena of some sort […] (2008, p. 2).

Although this particular discourse is primarily referring to the right to the city in

economic and sociological terms, it is still important to address Harvey's argument, to

"claim some kind of shaping power" – whatever approach that may be. *Nights in the*

*City* is a project that could have targeted these marginalised groups and generated

material with the residents of the Manor Estate to shape a tour, and allowed that power

and control over the shaping of the piece to unfold. Instead, it created a divide between

audience and "performer", and Tomlin states that,

> […] changing the raw material from a working-class or underclass existence into
> art for a predominantly middle-class audience. Effectively, Nights in this City
> had placed its audience in the position of postmodern artists and implicated us in
> the very process of cultural appropriation, for it is not with the material itself
> that the problem lies but with the hands that shape it (Tomlin, 1999, p. 143).

Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat refer to Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) and note

their thinking on the matter of social deprivation and change and note that it,

> […] involves a shift away from seeing people as the passive beneficiaries of
> welfare provided through state interventions and professional expertise and from
> seeing them as […] one-dimensional, objective socio-economic classifications.
> Instead, new approaches emphasize the capacity of people…to be active agents in
> shaping their lives, experiencing, acting upon and reconstituting the outcomes of
> welfare policies in variable ways (1999, p. 2).

As Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat note '[…] this discourse advocates for citizens to

produce change in their environment rather than being the object of change producing

strategies on them' (2009, p. 390). This is the primary concern of this thesis – citizen

empowerment through an active involvement that challenges the existing approach to

social and community regeneration. They also note that, '[p]articipation is not enough. It must lead to action that can impact on change to the status quo' (2009, p. 390). A guided performance walk can implement social change, or instil a sense of belonging and pride in a community space through reflecting on personal stories, generated from local inhabitants, handing over authorship and working with and for local people that allows a level of empowerment and change to take place. *Nights in the City* used the mode of a coach, and for the purpose of my research this doesn't allow the audience to be part of the street as they are too separated from its happening, unlike the intimate self propelled audio tour of Janet Cardiff (1999).

A Canadian performance artist, Janet Cardiff has used the format of the audio walk since the early 1990s. This format typically uses an mp3 player with a pre-recorded narrative that provides instructions and descriptions for the walker to follow. In theatre terms, it plays with the notions of audience/participation and the role of the performer. In one sense the audience is also the performer as they meander through the streets following those – perhaps unknowing "performers" within the cityscape referred to on the soundtrack. In using the format of the guided tour it challenges the idea of the expert guide through manipulating it into a theatrical voice, guiding the audience on a narrative trail, subverting the guided tour to fit it into a new model.

In his article, 'Ghostly Footsteps: Voices, Memories and Walks in the City' (2001), David Pinder discusses Cardiff's audio tour*, The missing voice (case study B)* and he notes how it takes its participants through areas that are not commonly tourist spots, as Cardiff was concerned with creating narratives in the everyday spaces of the area. The

audio itself is a mix of speech, sound effects and film noir music that generates intrigue with the listener and instantly separates them from the everyday happenings of the street, transporting them into a fantasy world mixed with the realities of the city. Through my practice I was keen to experiment with both reality and fiction, and this audio walk acts as an interesting reference point to how the two intertwine. Pinder notes the role played by the cityscape in the narratives it creates, juxtaposed and at times linked to the recordings on the audio,

> The interweaving of recorded sounds with those of the city makes it difficult to locate their sources and to discern their reality. There are fragments of conversations and the noises of vehicles and wailing sirens. A parade passes through Brick Lane as you walk up it. A tour guide is overheard describing the history of the Jewish population in the area (Pinder, 2001, p. 5).

As Pinder claims the walker is caught between reality and fiction. The fiction is played out on the audio and through fantasies built up in the mind, whilst the reality is played out in front of the walker as she ambles through the alleyways and grids of the city. Though my walk is not listened to on headphones, the role audio would play was still at the forefront of my mind. I wanted to play with disembodied voices mixing with the everyday happenings on the street. This aligns with what Pinder discusses regarding narratives of the city, '[i]n effect it is performed or co-created by participants. It is the very condition of the city to be plural with a multiplicity of stories, an inexhaustability of narratives, peopled with strangers and difference' (2001, p. 2).

The city provides the artist with not simply a backdrop to their work but avenues, alleyways, monuments, doorways and "actors" that all form part of the story, thus making it an unpredictable and ever changing narrative. The material in Janet Cardiff's walk is embellished and brings intrigue to the listener; it doesn't attempt to deliver facts about the area, but instead uses the streets to generate stories,

> [...] on my walk there is indeed a lime green car parked by the side of Fashion Street (as I pass, a man in a nearby doorway gives me a knowing nod, seemingly in on the act); and, just as Cardiff says, there is a man walking towards me along Bishopsgate in a suit with his collar too tight (2001, p. 5).

It is these real happenings and everyday occurrences that bring interest to the guided tour; it is the unexpected mixed with the expected. Participants who have walked *The Missing Voice* have made references to hearing dogs when it has been mentioned in the text, or have seen a car described go past. Again these correlations heighten the experience of fantasy (the idealistic expectation) verses reality, and reinforce the actuality of the spaces visited. The physical space that is embodied by the audience/participant is the backdrop, but also the narrative of the tour and the same walk can never be replicated exactly the same, as the streets remain unpredictable and shift in narrative from minute to minute. This is where the guided walk can blur fantasy and reality, and offer fictional stories in real spaces, or offer factual stories within a space whose reality is heightened through the use of actors. Furthermore, as Pinder notes, the format of the audio walk is multifaceted, it uses the city spaces as its backdrop, the city user becomes an unwitting performer, shop fronts become an integral part to the unfolding narrative through their name, purpose or happenings. All of these components build upon the palimpsest of the city space. As well as all this, the artists who make the work are concerned with the cultural significance of a space, 'I will suggest that, along with other recent projects, it opens up space for reflecting        on important issues relating to urban walking and subjectivity, representation, memory and an urban unconscious' (Pinder, 2001, p. 3).

All these factors make up an urban walk and are exploited in the process and execution of it. It changes every time and thus memories, representations and the urban

unconscious are altered each time. With the approach I am researching, I am particularly concerned with the "urban unconscious", as Pinder says, this opens up room for question, and therefore participants of the guided walk in the known space alter from possessing an "urban unconscious" to being aware and involved with their surroundings and can take a conscious look at the city. As in Cardiff's walk, through actively engaging with the city, the urban walker is able to consciously become part of the city. This allows them to attain and/or use intimate knowledge of a place and become part of and change its everyday function, thus possessing ownership**.** I think the participant's attention on the city through walking and observing it as something other than habitual enables transcendence over its everyday function. Crucially, this enables an awareness that the meanings of the city are far from being fixed in space or time. Rather, as Pinder notes, the city is constantly moving and shifting its narrative, 'As narrator, many of Cardiff's references are to the present – to newspaper headlines on newsstands, to building works that may have now moved on – and these heighten the sense of the transience and changing rhythms of urban life' (2001, p. 5).

The city has many seemingly permanent structures, yet these spaces and structures change through time and these changes can be read politically. Redevelopment and regeneration can have huge impact on cities and towns, and often it is for the attraction of tourists rather than the local. Yet, it is the people who possess the memories, not the buildings, something I explore with *Swanning Around Erdington* as a means to generate material. I was keen to explore what this would result in for a walk conceived and developed for the local resident, as I will discuss in detail in chapter four. Pinder notes how the rhythms of the city are constantly changing as people pass through the spaces and Cardiff attempts to bring the changes of the urban plan into focus by raising the

ghosts of past buildings, enabling a shift in the viewing of the present.

A tour that I was an audience member of in April 2011 replaced the more familiar audio guide with a traditional tour guide, offering the narration and information along its route. It was conceived by Phil Smith of Wrights and Sites and took place in Plymouth, entitled *West End Twalk.* Like Cardiff's tour, its content and area of choice for the walk was a subversion of a typical guided walk. Visiting the area, I was effectively a tourist, in an unfamiliar environment, taking a guided tour. The tour was designed around the West End of the city, which is the "undesirable area". It doesn't host the tourist shops steeped in Devon history, its functionality is more practical than that, and it serves as an area for the everyday inhabitant of Plymouth. Here we were presented with the new plans for Plymouth's West End – *The Covent Garden of Plymouth*. The premise of the piece focused on the area being targeted for regeneration and at the end of the tour we were presented with a leaflet displaying the "new and improved" area. It showed expensive wine and food, and models smiling at the regenerated area. The leaflet didn't reflect the streets as they are used today, which is what the tour was attempting to show its audience through being amongst the regular shoppers and inhabitants. The area is seen as undesirable, yet each day regular walkers of the city use the shops for their needs. This is precisely the type of area examined for my own practice, one that is often overlooked and dismissed as serving any real purpose, spaces which the planners see becoming something other than what it is, namely a functional part of the city.

The area and the journey of *West End Twalk* used the post WWII's architecture as its backdrop and the architect, Sir Patrick Abercrombie's intention for the city as its basis. He was an architect with a vision to transform the West End of the city into a modern,

structured, clean lined place to be rid of the congested streets that existed pre-world war II. The plan was conceived six months after the bombings of the city in 1941, it wasn't released until 1944 and the reconstruction begun in 1947. This suggests a level of power the planners have over the construction of a city. The old had been destroyed and a new, more modern version was being planned without the inhabitants knowing. The designers of the city planned what they deemed to be the future.

The walk began outside the area's indoor market, known locally as Pannier Market, although the market hasn't officially be known as this since the 1950s, the local people still call it by its original name. This already creates defiance against authority and displays people using memories and nostalgia to give meaning to places they know and use. As the guide introduced himself the walkers or the participants of the tour were brought into the mind of a Mythogeographer, a word coined by Wrights and Sites as they developed their artistic strand of walking as art,

> Now, I'm a Mythogeographer and the first principle of Mythogeography is that every place has multiple meanings and we attempt to make that multiplicity explicit and resist any attempt to restrict or homogenise those meanings. But I'm going to contradict myself straight away – because today I want to look at this area – a part of the West End of Plymouth – through two lenses: maps and bodies. Well, you've brought your bodies and I've got a number of maps here […] (Smith, P. 2011, *West End Twalk*).

This idea of viewing an area through the two lenses of maps and bodies intertwined as the journey progressed through the streets of Plymouth. The body became a prominent metaphor and the maps used were those designed by the city planners. These two elements represented two very different aspects of reading a city, the body represented the physical embodiment in the space, within the grasp of the city, whilst the map symbolised the voyeur and watcher of the city, as the French Philosopher, Michel de

Certeau argues in his chapter 'Walking in the City' (1984).

De Certeau opens with an analogy of looking at a city from above, offering an omniscient view of ground level. De Certeau's scopic drive here was to examine the difference between being part of the street and removing oneself from the city to challenge the ideas surrounding one's place in the city. This suggests a celestial power of looking down at the passers-by and the grid system of streets. From this height one is removed from the living streets and is no longer part of the city and all its offerings, but instead, as de Certeau suggests becomes a voyeur. Although this "god like" view suggests a power and omniscience, in actual fact, as de Certeau argues, it creates such a distance that the voyeur cannot understand the city. De Certeau suggests that the city planners, who objectively observe a city through the lens of a deity rather than a citizen who walks and lives the streets, adopt this approach. This perspective alters the function of the "looker", as de Certeau observes, '[i]t puts him at a distance' (1984, p. 92), he is no longer part of the city, and instead is the watcher. I feel it is this perspective that creates a divide between those who plan and those who live the streets.

The plan we were presented with for the west end area of Plymouth represented a utopian society. The urban planners, like de Certeau's deity, were lifted from the "city's grasp" and designed what they believed removed the city from "congestion and unhygienic conditions", and thus consequently idealising a place through designs rather than the reality, or the conceptual space rather than the lived space. '[m]odern, cool, spacious, like a plan made in stone […] in which there is only flow designed for people who behave like ideas […]' (Smith, P. 2011, *West End Twalk*). The tour made it clear that the people who inhabit and who inhabited the streets of Plymouth's West End were

not considered in its design, for people do not behave like ideas – they act upon their own impulses and desires and therefore create something of their own making, that doesn't necessarily fit into the ideals of an architect and urban planner.

The walk began, firstly through the chaotic market, selling an array of multicultural and multi-sensory products. This seemingly disordered space is again removed from the symmetrical ideals of a post war town, and is instead reminiscent of a pre-war society, congested and busy. Walking through the market we were encouraged to smell and look at the array of products for sale and as we left the building, crabmeat and lit incense sticks were passed around for the audience to taste, smell and hold. This multi-sensory approach to the tour allowed the audience to get a full sense of the West End of Plymouth through tasting and smelling what was on sale in a prominent market of the area. In contrast to the visual aspect of tourism I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this walk relied more upon the multiple senses, therefore it displayed how this kind of work transcends the visual spectacle that one is distanced from, and places the walker at the heart of the tour, something I was keen to explore in my methodology. This sense of physical engagement with the tastes smells and sounds of the city changed when we walked across an enclosed bridge that connected a car park and a leisure centre. Below the bridge was a shopping centre and the particular shop we walked over was a toyshop – full of brightly coloured boxes and toys for the consumer. Looking down on this put me at a distance like de Certeau's deity and the city planners, I was a watcher, voyeuristically looking at the walker of the city. However, unlike de Certeau's vantage point, the height here seemed insignificant, it was the domed glass, the physical barrier between me and the consumer that set me aside and disabled me from being a consumer. I could be objective, yet I wasn't able to be part of the city, I was not able to

fully understand its text. I was a body – passing through it, encased in a tunnel and an abject space. The glass acted as a screen and the action a mediatised spectacle, reminiscent of a film for the audience as watchers to see, making it appear even more distanced. This fourth wall became an important metaphor in my process, one I wanted to avoid in the making of my work. As we left the leisure/shopping centre we were taken outside with a view of an old grand hotel. The room at the top of the hotel had a dome structure with panoramic views of the city. Smith recounted the time he went up there and was surprised to see a picture of The World Trade Centre in the room, and being at the top of this structure. It instantly reminded him of de Certeau's opening chapter to *Walking in the City*, where he describes being at the top of the World Trade Centre acts an analogy for being lifted from the city's grasp and looking down upon it as a voyeur would. Once again, this separation is something I was keen to avoid; I wanted audience and myself to be part of the town's grasp, walking with and amongst the people of the street.

We were taken to a vantage point where we were able to look across and down at the area where we started our tour, we were able to see the market and the backs of buildings we had walked amongst. This gave us, again, that objective view as it had from the bridge. We had moved from being active walkers of the city to looking at the city from a distance. We had the eyes of a planner, looking at the system that Abercrombie had imposed. We were taken to the "backstage" area (as coined by Smith). It felt removed from the clear lined streets of the West End. Where we stood was hidden away yet it hosted an art-deco building that was within a car park that was overrun with congested cars, and subsequently reminded us of the failure of Abercrombie's vision.

> [...] you won't find many of its attractions in surface or fixed appearances, they are in the connections, the overlaps, the clashes and the flows […]   in its mutilations and its imperfect bodies, creating their own pleasures within the cracks and affordances that the planners fail to account for […] in the contemplations of grand plans that slide down slopes and are upset by burgeoning root [...](Smith, P. 2011,*West End Twalk*).

It seems the very identity of a place lies not in the city plan designed by idealists, but by those who write its own present. Yet, it is these places, whose pleasures are not seen or lived by the planners that are under threat of being transformed into something that they are not. A new vision is conjured up by the urban planners to improve and radicalise an area that in their eyes has failed somewhere. *West End Twalk* put its audience at the heart of Plymouth's streets, allowing us to discover the hidden treasures. The question of ownership or the right to the city, however, still remains, for the ones who shape the city are still held at a distance by those who design its plan. My work is not about challenging these misconceptions for the outsider, but more about transforming the lived space through a reinforced positive perspective to the inhabitant. This was achieved through *Swanning Around Erdington* with a familiar, yet surprising narrative to guide them. As *West End Twalk's* audience was made up of theatre makers and academics it was difficult to measure its potential impact on the familiar audience member/walker. In order to analyse this relationship I will now focus on the role of the audience in a range of performance walks, and then move on to exploring how my practice was designed to challenge this relationship.

# CHAPTER 2

**AUDIENCE EMPOWERMENT – OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORSHIP OF SPACE**

Community based work that has been conceived by artists over recent years has contributed to shaping the theatrical landscape, and those that work within the remit of socially engaged art invariably respond to a socio-political discourse, this is largely due to the methodologies employed; working with local communities, attempting to change something, and/or tackling issues such as racism or homophobia.

Within the form of urban and rural walks, this relates to society and community or the urban spaces and ownership and the unconscious walker, as coined by Michel de Certeau. This chapter will focus on further examples of performance walks and the audiences' role within them.

## 2.1: The Audience

The theatre audience's role, like theatre itself has changed and been challenged over time, shifts in various art movements have seen audience members become immersed in pieces of work. This has been apparent in events such as Happenings, Fluxus, site-specific work, socially engaged practice, pervasive gaming and immersive theatre, all of which have shifted the expectations of the audience in some way.

Early examples of audience participation include performance artist, Marina Abramovic in her seminal piece of work, *Rhythm 0* (1974) (as discussed in Freshwater, 2009) which questioned the role of the audience and their passivity. She put herself at the mercy of her audience in a room with 72 objects, some used for pleasure, some for pain, and

allowed the audience to use them as they wished. Over the course of the six hour durational piece, the audience became more aggressive, cutting her skin, putting a loaded gun to her head and cutting her clothes off, and thus the boundaries of performance art and participation were pushed to the limits. More recent companies who continue to question the role of participation in performance are Dreamthinkspeak, Blast Theory and Punchdrunk. Dreamthinkspeak create site-specific pieces of work, such as a piece entitled *Underground*, (The Old Abattoir, Clerkenwell, October 2005) that set its audience off with simple instructions to follow an actor or choose their own path around the space. As an audience member I felt empowered, I defied the choice to follow an actor, and instead made my own route around the performance space. I stumbled upon happenings, entered spaces that at first glance appeared to be installations, but which I later discovered to be rooms set up for actors to enter and perform. There was no expectation from me as an audience member; I wasn't put on display, but simply watched, in any order that I pleased.

The transformation of the audiences' role was a catalyst of change that allowed the audience to expect more from theatre makers, and in some cases the artists expect more from their audience, as seen with Blast Theory's *Kidnap* (1998) where chosen participants could experience what it is like to be kidnapped, thus making them a submissive audience member as well as performer. Within *Kidnap*, Blast theory put potential "victims" under surveillance, documenting their everyday activities before they chose the winners and kidnapped them. Audience members watched via the Internet as the victims were placed in a confined room and underwent activities throughout the piece's duration.

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This level of participation is arguably disempowering, unlike Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2012), which, like Dreamthinkspeak, hands over the power to the audience through allowing them to walk through their performance at their own impulse and pace. There is a fine line between empowerment and disempowerment with participation and as a theatre artist myself, I often place the audience in 'role' and enlist their help to solve a mystery or a riddle. This interaction with the piece in an educational context is both engaging and helpful for the young audience to understand the story that is presented to them as it brings them into a world where they can leave inhibitions and play within a safe place. It is also a tool to empower them through making them believe their involvement has allowed the performance to progress, which works for children as they are suspended in disbelief. Involvement is an area I am exploring with adults within my work, and assessing to what extent participatory work can be empowering, without that suspension of disbelief.

Street performances are commonly found in public spaces but can be intimidating as Helen Freshwater notes '[a]nxiety and apprehension are central to many of the effects and affects evoked by participatory performance' (2009, p. 65). There are pieces of work that can be alienating and disempowering for the audience member, but it certainly isn't implicit of interactive work. There is indeed room to re-examine the role of the audience in theatre in public spaces and make it less threatening and more inviting.

## 2.2: The audience and performance walks

A contemporary company who explore the role of the audience is Wrights and Sites, as well as creating work that is performer led, they have also created a 'do-it-yourself'

manual entitled the *Mis-guides* (2006). As discussed in Chapter One, a guided tour can be live or recorded, this distinction is the same for the performance walk, and it is the absent guide in the *Mis-guides* that breaks from the traditions of the guided walk/tour. The *Mis-guides* is about re-discovering places, getting lost and seeing places and spaces in a new way. It's a paradoxical text which challenges the tourist industry's city guide book in a way that opens up new possibilities of walking and discovering. '[…] to step on the cracks and find the tracks extending your territory becoming more aware of the restrictions being imposed by sights and surfaces and the aggressive armoured invasion of the car […]' (2006, p. 100).

Through this text the reader, and subsequently the walker, becomes both the guided and the guidee through the instructions in the manual, and thus these instructions do become a guide in a subverted way, and the participants are given authorship and ownership of their guide. It relies on the idea that each misguide can be translated for any space, their ideas have been developed using the format of the expert guide and disrupting it to fit a new model.

These misguides, like a guidebook, are for self-guiding purposes, those who choose to use them can become both an audience to passers-by and generate a passing audience through their conduct. There is no sense of a script, or offerings of facts. It simply gives the reader/walker the opportunity to see a place through a different lens and (re)discover spaces anew. Wrights and Sites outline the theories behind the work.

> Many of us drive long distances to get to our places of work. Perhaps we gave the journey our whole attention at first. But the road rapidly becomes familiar. After a while, it becomes invisible, a featureless corridor from home to work, a non-place where the mind drifts and we suddenly find ourselves arriving having no memory of the journey (2006, p. 7).

This disrupted approach to guided tours is a new and innovative way of looking at how we view the world and experience it. It doesn't need to be a generalised, organised walking tour that attempts to appeal to all who book onto it, instead they are bespoke, self directed approaches to the everyday, simply turned on their head to allow people to see the mundane in a fresh way that potentially could make them see it as something new and exciting.

The work of Wrights and Sites places emphasis on the role of the audience and the guide, and they explore the potential the local audience has to influence the walk. If the participant of the walk has a relationship with the spaces visited then the walk invokes memories and emotions from them, if it is a new place then the participant shapes the walk through their presence and questions that may be asked along the way, as I experienced in Phil Smith's *West End Twalk*.

Mike Pearson's *Bubbling Tom* (2002) drew on memories of both the artist and participants; it was a reflective walk that brought a community of people together. Pearson returned to his home village, marking both the Millennium and his fiftieth birthday to create this walk. The latter signifies a deeply personal reason, to revisit his old memories through an approach that reconnected him with the physical narratives of the sites, thus creating something that could transport him throughout the different stages of his life. The audience was taken on his journey, with Pearson as the guide, following the format of a stroll around the village, which stopped at ten key locations. These locations all had some significance for Pearson, and furthermore, would have held significance for the majority of the local audience. Dee Heddon discusses the walk and notes that,

> [...]What he does here [...] is revisit childhood  haunts,  recite  childhood memories, replay childhood events, blowing the past into the present and taking his fellow travellers along with him in order that they too might revisit, remember, replay (Heddon, 2002, p. 4).

As Heddon points out, Pearson invited his audience to remember and play alongside him; they were not merely passive audience or walkers. This particular aspect of the performance invited the walking audience to project their own stories into the piece, which could have permitted a level of ownership over the material and whether unplanned or anticipated, the input from the audience is what I want to explore. I am interested in what factors contributed to the audience members sharing their own stories, whether that it was their space, or assumed to be their space, either way this is something that can be developed further.

The ownership of space and what this could potentially mean for performance walks in the known space is an area that hasn't been fully explored. If the site is personal to the audience, then arguably a deeper connection is established as they have walked with the artist, thus they have benefitted from its intentions and experienced something tangible. Through being part of the history of the piece and the inhabited place, even before they choose to take part, they are inextricably linked to the tour.

However, if the entire site used for the performance no longer exists physically, but does so in a metaphorical sense through soundscapes and memories then this relationship is shifted. Such is the case with Graeme Miller's *Linked* (2003) project, which was made along a site forming part of a main road but which had previously existed as a housing estate. It was made using interviews and stories from the inhabitants of the previous site, and these anecdotes transform the space and transport the listener through a ghostly walk in East London. Miller was commissioned to create a piece of work for London's

oral history collection and Carl Lavery discusses it in *The Pepys of London E11: Graeme Miller and the Politics of Linked,* (2005)

> (he) interviewed local citizens and road protesters and broadcast their testimonies from twenty transmitters that line the route of the link road. In order to activate the work, the participant borrows a headset from a local library and is invited to follow the link road from Hackney to Wanstead, a distance of roughly four miles (2005, p. 48).

I walked three miles of this route, from Leyton to Wanstead in 2012 – nine years after Miller conceived it. From Leyton library I headed back to the tube station as instructed by my map and began following the directions laid out for. I was to hear ten transmitters between Leyton and Leytonstone. I walked, checked my bearings, nothing. I walked some more aware that there is moments of silence - except this silence had become a permanent void and I found myself halfway along the route, still hoping I would pick up the transmitters, but realising that was not going to happen. I had walked a mile and a half and heard nothing but road noise and the occasional voice on the street, I had walked the streets as it is now, but I had hoped to be transported into a lost space. I decided to walk to the next pick up point and do a smaller version of the walk.

I picked up my new transmitter and headed back to my route. I heard white noise followed by voices. It was the same as before, I was walking the existing streets, but this time I was reminded of what the space would have been. What struck me was that these sounds could only be heard on this route, they weren't able to be downloaded and listened to again at one's leisure, they belonged to these spaces, trapped between the motorway and the suburbs. It offered a haunting quality to the voices and sounds that entered the headset in sporadic moments over the mile and a half I walked in unknown

territory. Though even with my working headset I still missed a few transmitters along the way due to the excessive road noise and the dwindling quality of the transmitters.

I heard stories of the postman knowing the space so well that he knew there would be a dog behind a bin, waiting as he approached to deliver his mail. Stories that reflected using the local shop to buy supplies - nothing extraordinary, simply the memories of people using and living in their community. This was also a site that was personal to Miller, as it was where he grew up. In this way it would have held personal resonance with potential audience members who were former residents, also, although others may have had no relation to the site. This was a piece which was created to preserve memories of those that once inhabited the demolished site. The majority of Pearson's audience was also made up of local residents, thus they felt a certain ownership over the sites visited. What Miller draws on is the intrinsic significance of site, not its importance according to the council or conservation companies, but for people who inhabit these places. For the residents of this demolished site, it was their home, but as the houses were destroyed to build a road, they were discarded. Through *Linked*, Miller created a legacy to preserve the memories of the people and site – as significant. This piece celebrates the once occupied space with soundscape that reflects the stories of the area,

> Concealed along a three-mile route, 20 transmitters continually broadcast hidden voices, recorded testimonies and rekindled memories of those who once lived and worked where the motorway now runs. From the intensely political to the quietly everyday, *Linked* allows moments of the past to haunt the present.
>
> http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/archive/londonsvoices/linked/linked.htm

But what can also occur, is that the stark present can interrupt the memories of the past,

at Leytonstone I was forced to divert and travel back on myself. As I crossed a bridge of the motorway it became clear what had caused the diversion, police lined the motorway, covering what I could only assume to be a dead body. This threw me from the past of the people in my ear to the visual of the present. This image juxtaposed with stories of a once tight knit community was eye opening. An exposed bridge traversed over one of the busiest roads in the country and someone had committed suicide. Suddenly, it wasn't a space that once had a past, it had new stories encroached upon it, but not ones of a tight community. This became the marker of my experience of this walk, the past voices at this point seemed to trail off into insignificance, and it made me question the weight of everyday nuances and how easily they can be overshadowed by the big events that can so easily consume the everyday spaces. Though even with something as shifting as this event, and with my pace and my route interrupted, I carried on, and I finished the walk. People are resilient to such events, and the city carries on with alternations of pace, rhythm and events.

What *Linked* does do is to reflect upon site through in-depth research and sensitivity, however, as Carl Lavery identifies in his paper for Miller, the '[…] site is absent' (2005, p. 149). What he worked with was the politics of such a space; the fact that it was demolished without concern for the residents formed the foundations of the piece. 'As you walk along the route from Hackney to Wanstead, listening to the testimonies of the evicted and the re-located, it becomes impossible not to think about larger existing communities' (2005, p. 150).

Although on one level I agree with Lavery, I also think the walk keeps you focused on the physical space, personally, I was too concentrated on the map, wondering when the

next transmitter would happen, and trying to get a good reception to think about the larger community. I was therefore walking the ghostly footsteps of a lost community, unable to shift my mind to my own experiences or other communities. It seemed that most of my processing towards this piece of work relied upon reflection, and I did, as Lavery discusses, acknowledge my own experiences and ask questions about what we are faced with everyday, but only in hindsight. Perhaps it was the constant search for reception from the transmitters, or the fact that I was in an unfamiliar environment that had few directions that disallowed me from making the connections in the present. Considering the walk, I acknowledged that for the residents of the East London site, their community was forcibly taken away from them, whereas today's society sees the decline of the community, even in those spaces that haven't been demolished. Therefore, can a project with the same research and development as *Linked* have the same impact on existing communities? Miller wrote in an article for *The Guardian* newspaper:

> We live at a time when people increasingly express the feeling that the world outside our windows is a dangerous and fragmented place. Once upon a time people walked through the city and it gave them a chance to name places and make contact with each other. Each individual has a different map of the city. But humans need to mark their lives against real space and other people. When they cease to walk, the real spaces become less plausible […] (1993, p. 28).

Miller was recognising the changing society and disconnection with our own spaces. In *Linked,* Miller was able to bring the personal memories of a space into a place of destruction and non-description, what he did was re-humanise it. *Linked* is set to continue indefinitely, the continuation of this kind of work marks the significance and importance of such pieces and recognises performance walks as significant. I am interested in how this can be taken further to translate to the neglected, under-celebrated urban-town space.

I have discussed the notion of a walking tour and the expectation of the tourist and the gaze. Furthermore, I have discussed this concept in relation to the theatre and the subverted guided tour, both within the urban and rural setting. My research will now examine how this idea can be taken to areas and audiences that have never been a focus of guided tours or public performances and those who have little familiarity of experiencing theatre in their space. Can the same formats translate to these spaces without fixed monuments and celebrated history, and can the format work with audience as residents?

# CHAPTER THREE

## RECLAMATION OF SPACE

### 3.1: Theories of walking in the urban space

In order to ascertain whether a non-tourist community setting can be used as a site for urban walking tours I refer back to de Certeau's philosophies, I will examine his ideas of walking the city and how he reflects on ownership and power. His theories will allow me to examine how the everyday walker uses their urban space, and whether this functional space can be transformed into an artistic space. As an artist, I propose, in response to de Certeau, that through walking the streets the citizen *can* possess the power to read their own city, as it is how one looks, walks and interacts with space that can help shape understanding and alter perspectives. These readings may be on differing levels, and occur as a conscious reading or a subconscious understanding. Either way, the everyday occupier of the city can change the function of the everyday space. De Certeau argues that '[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered' (1984, p. 97). It is the act of walking itself that breathes life into a system, regardless of what initial intentions were. Like the speech act, it can follow or deviate from the "rules" of the system, it can create myriad possibilities. The premise of this philosophical argument moves away from the notion that walkers of the city use the system that has been put in place by the city planners and constructors; de Certeau argues that when people feel an imposition about the spaces that are mapped out for them, rather than adhering to the rules and prohibitions that are designed to control behaviours, people defy these rules and they find their own way through their space, they use authority of their own making. De Certeau claims that

the '[…[city is a concept' (1984, p. 94) its physical structures and walkways remain void of meaning before people pass through them. I wish to argue that through offering new perspectives of reading and re-writing one's space and establishing ownership of an under-celebrated place and revisiting it through a fresh approach, will instil a sense of pride and identity. Within my own practice I have been able to measure this through the reactions I have had through talking to local people of Erdington about their memories, and the impact of the walk on local people. Both of which have offered me insights into how people respond to the idea of sharing stories and listening to a local narrative that has significance on their lives.

## 3.2: (Re)claiming the streets

Nicholas Fyfe sets out to ask questions about the design of the space and the people who occupy and asks, '[w]hat […] does the design of streets reveal about dominant ideas in politics and planning? How are social identities and social practices shaped by people's experiences of the street?' (Fyfe, 1998, p. 1) These questions are explored through *Images of the Street* and Fyfe describes space first and foremost as a postmodern notion,

> For modernists the street is a space 'from which to get from A to B, rather than to live in', displacing the street 'from lifeworld to system'. (Lash and Friedmann, 1992: 10;) for postmodernists, the street is a place designed to foster and complement new urban lifestyles, reclaiming the street from system to lifeworld (1998, p. 1).

This implies a certain approach to how one reads and experiences space, and if this is the case for the public, then Fyfe is suggesting that people are concerned with the reclamation of the street, rather than it simply being a functional space, it becomes a

living and playful space. This idea of reclaiming the street into the "lifeworld" is what I am interested in and what I feel could become a widely recognised approach to working with communities and instilling a sense of ownership into the under-celebrated spaces. Quentin Stevens argues in *The Ludic City* (2007) that '[e]ach city […] retains an historical depth of relations to patterns of social behaviour […]' (2007, p. 13) if we have moved away from the "system" and entered the "lifeworld" era of the street then what Stevens discusses offers a new insight into the public space and how it can be read as playful; arguing that '[o]ne of the fundamental functions of public space is as a setting for informal, non-instrumental social interaction, or play' (2007: intro). This approach to reading an urban space is one I wish to adopt, as it is how I believe space needs to be read in order to engage with the people who inhabit it. Too often the perceived decaying space is criticised and scrutinised through government initiatives and news coverage, whereas I argue the places need room for celebration and cohesion. Stevens goes on to note that,

> [p]lay is an important but largely neglected aspect of people's experience of urban society, and embraces a wide variety of activities which are spontaneous, irrational or risky, and which are often unanticipated by designers, managers and other users. (2007: intro)

I would also argue for playfulness being part of a community and how people interact with their space, which is something I was keen to employ in my methodology for my walk, which was evident in the resulting street party where I invited the audience to decorate it with bunting, thus creating it through playfulness. The walk as a whole acted as a means for the audience to be separate from being within a functional space and instead be together as a community.

Public urban spaces have the potential to be tapped into as a site for performative walks,

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as there is the room for happenings to take place, they are abundant with history, memories and stories to be told and celebrated, yet there is a distinct lack of them in many, '[t]he most beautiful cities were those where festivals were not planned in advance, but there was a space where they could unfold' (Lefebvre, 1987, p. 36). This is what I implemented with *Swanning Around Erdington,* although planned on my behalf, for the town it offered an alternation of activity and thus the space was altered. '[t]he city is a site for multiplicitous practices of desire and not only of systematic, instrumental necessity' (Stevens, 2007, p. 9). The street is a place for meetings, encounters, walks, shopping etc.; it could also be read as a backdrop for simply occupying a space that is familiar and comforting. The street is also a space to see varied practices, especially within the contemporary urban space, as discussed by David Crouch in his chapter, '[t]he Street in the Making of Popular Geographical Knowledge'*,* '[c]ultural practices spill out onto the street from diverse corners of ordinary life; numerous sites of cultural practices are visible from the street, and are part of the image of the street' (Crouch, 1998, p. 160). With so many happenings in the street, it is, as Stevens discusses, a playground, a spectacle of events, whether these events are everyday happenings or organised street interventions. These happenings can as Stevens discusses, present us with triggers into our memories, and this is where a sense of familiarity and nostalgia plays its part in shaping the street,

> [f]or the individual walking through the city, images of the past and present are confronted at random and can be freely associated. These images may provide surprise (even involuntary) triggers for memories of a collective history, traditions and rituals, which had been forgotten through subsequent physical and social changes (Stevens, 2007, p 25).

David Crouch argues that '[s]treets trigger memories; they are the site where events happen, cut across, depart from, spill onto' (1998, p. 163). Crouch notes that the streets

are the places that resonate within the people who know them. He refers to Common Ground, a charity set up in 1982 that explores the "local distinctiveness", of a place. They developed Parish maps, which locals produced to highlight what was special about their area. Crouch discusses how they put together these maps and discovered that,

> [...] in these 'maps' are people who live in a village, estate or corner of the city. These maps are full of anecdote, memory, hopes and evasions; notes of celebration and irony, all depicted as writing or sketches inscribed across or around a usually central shape of the streets of the place (1998, p. 162).

This suggests a real sense of identity and knowledge of one's space. It is not necessarily ground breaking information or facts that have uncovered a thousand year old tradition, but it is still relevant and important, it is shaped by people's memories. He goes to discuss that,

> These are [...] documents [...] people produce themselves, produced through the shared experience of everyday life...these amateur maps of popular-expert knowledge suggest how streets may be significant in 'ordinary' lived experience (1998, p. 163).

But what appears to be the case is that people who walk and thus live the city have the least power over the functionality of space. It is this very point that I wish to address through examining walking and the city through the eyes of the citizen who occupies the urban space, and how this everyday, lived space is socially regenerated through their local, expert knowledge.

## 3.3: The under-celebrated urban space

The under-celebrated urban space, with buildings falling into dilapidation and no significant monuments to speak of, have certain stigmas attached to them; they become places of obscurity and are seldom mentioned other than to criticise. Their identity is

not read through received history or guided tours, but is rooted in people's memories and everyday experiences. What I propose, is a system of working with spaces that are marginal, forgotten about and neglected, the spaces that are a priority for regeneration and tapping into the forgotten pasts and the present to create a guided tour, which challenges the format of a traditional one, with active participants that help write the tour, like Miller's voices in *Linked*.

It is precisely these spaces that are designed without the "eye" of those who will use the spaces everyday, the people who are deprived of having the authority, as most city planners design the "new and improved" centres that deliberately exclude the people who live there. My theories are about re-empowering the eye of those who occupy the space and not, as Forced Entertainment did with *Nights in the City* hand over the power to the outsider, but rather give authorship and ownership to the local inhabitant. These spaces belong to communities, families of generations who utilise the spaces every day, yet they are viewed as unsightly and unfashionable. The act of walking, should, as de Certeau argues, be an individual choice, an expression through environment, which lessens authority. However, this is often beyond the control of the citizen. I argue for the local inhabitant possessing the power to shape the streets and the identity of the lived space. To understand a place is to live it. It ceases to matter what the intentions of the city planner were, for as de Certeau argues these are defied and *people* give the city a voice, and thus are the ones who understand the spaces they inhabit. I argue that what de Certeau is identifying can be pushed further and include the communities that are both non-migrating within some sectors and transient in others, thus their identity is problematic.

The issue concerning identification is related mainly to the transient groups, as their impermanence could project the meaning that a community isn't present, and this therefore can cause identification problems for the non-migrating "host" community. It is precisely these problems that arise that give cause for more projects to happen and find the moments to celebrate, rather than focus on the negativity. Focusing on the idea of the local inhabitant consciously reading and writing their own space within the towns/cities that don't attract tourists could bring back a sense of ownership. Town planners need not possess this ownership over places, and they are not exclusively for them to build and claim possession. Instead, these spaces can lead to artists offering a rewrite of these spaces without projecting authority as a town planner would, but facilitating and working with local inhabitants to create walking tours that reflect those who live and walk the town on a daily basis.

In *Swanning around Erdington* I began to explore the possibility of borrowing, adopting and adapting the idea of the traditional guided tour that takes place in known and historically significant places to develop tours with community members of Erdington. The act of walking then becomes a performative act that overturns what it's there for, it arguably becomes more than an act of functionality, as someone, through the act of engaging with their hometown in a new light, identifies the potential of space and those choices made within that space. This idea radicalises the use of space in the under-celebrated urban space. Cathy Turner, notes that de Certeau '[…] makes a distinction between "space" and "place", defining space as "a practised place". That is, space is created by the ways in which place is *moved through*' (2004, p. 373). It can only be brought to life through the people that occupy the space. Turner goes on to discuss de Certeau and notes that he claims, 'In relation to place, space is like the word when it is

spoken' (2004, p. 373). I am therefore suggesting that it is for the people who live the streets to attach meaning and value to the architecture of the place inhabited. As Wrights and Sites discuss in their paper, *Mis-guiding the City Walker*, the artist has the power and freedom to alter a space,

> [t]he serious play of the artist might become one of guide or mis-guide through real time and space rather than as narrator or interpreter of place. The performer would perhaps become a signpost re-framing the geography of the city in rejection of the closure of historic interpretation.
>
> (http://www.misguide.com/ws/documents/citywalker.html)

The space therefore, has the capacity to become a playground, with endless avenues of old and new streets forming a backdrop and narrative to a tour that is relevant to its inhabitants, something that a monument's intended meaning may not possess. An insider and intimate knowledge of the local audience forms the concept for their role within my practice and in *Swanning around Erdington*, which I will now discuss. I began to challenge whether memory and experiences of a town, rather than the city, which is perpetually invoked by theorists and artists, could be the catalyst for shared stories to take place.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## A GUIDED WALK - *SWANNING AROUND ERDINGTON*

### 4.1: Socially engaged practice and oral histories

My methodology was to challenge the view of regeneration and argue that the functionality of space can be used to generate a walk that will be celebratory and attract local people to see and experience their hometown through a new approach, as attempted in Miller's *Linked* that used unremarkable spaces and integrated local ephemeral voices into the spaces. My own practice draws on this method as well as theories derived from socially engaged practice and community arts as a means to generate a walk that gives authorship to the local resident.

Such walks examine spatial patterns and use these to construct a walk that remains sensitive to the site through collecting and using personal memories and personal histories. This project fits in with the idea of making art more accessible to the marginalized areas within Birmingham. *Arts Champions Scheme* has set up an organization that promotes this and their policy is to,

> […] act as advocates for the arts sector giving advice and support within the community to promote and deliver new activities…to ensure wider access to the full range of world class arts for Birmingham's communities […]

> (http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite/arts.champions)

However, instead of the large organisations teaming up with the communities, I wanted to work within a place through tapping into existing groups and individuals to create art on the doorstep – with and for that community. Walking as art has become a varied and

practised mode of theatre over recent years, and this premise sits within that context, and that of socially engaged art, as discussed by theorists such as Shannon Jackson and Grant Kester.

Grant Kester's *Conversational Pieces* (2004) is a manifesto exploring the vast area of artwork that is created outside of the typical art venue, such as the museum or gallery, with a particular focus on work of the nineties. Kester describes the work he discusses as 'socially engaged art practice' (2004, p. xiii.). Kester composed the term "dialogical" for these projects, as an attempt to explain the work he cites, comparatively engaging with object-based work and dialogical practice,

> The object-based artwork (with some exceptions) is produced entirely by the artist and only subsequently offered to the viewer. As a result, the viewer's response has no immediate reciprocal effect on the constitution of the work. Further, the physical object remains essentially static. Dialogical projects, in contrast, unfold through a process of performative interaction (2004, p. 9).

Kester argues that the dialogue between artist and participant is central to the shaping of socially engaged art practice. Such a move has opened up much debate about how this work is defined, and the processes involved. In many of his examples, Kester explores the relationship the artist has with the community. Noting two different approaches to dialogical work, Kester discusses *House* (1993*)* by Rachel Whiteread and *West meets East* (1992) by The Art of Change, produced by Loraine Leeson. To sit alongside my research and practice, I refer to these projects as two contrasting approaches to making work within a community setting.

Whiteread's *House* was produced in Bow, one of the poorest boroughs in London, where 60% of the homes are council owned and a high unemployment rate. The piece

of work consisted of a cast of the interior space of a disused Edwardian terrace house. This example is explored by Kester as he keen to distinguish between two approaches, one where the artist works in collaboration with a community and one that simply situates the piece of work within a community. I was aware of not simply placing an event within a place, but actively engaging with it and local people. *House* artist, Rachel Whiteread did not confer with Bow community when conceptualising and creating this piece of work, there was no consensus, not even with the family that once occupied the house. This troubles Kester and he describes *House* as '[p]rovocative yet indeterminate, opaque yet open to different responses' (2004, p. 20). Kester argues how that result situated *House* within the avant-garde idea of '[…] shock, disruption, and ambiguity.' (2004, p. 18) And he notes how '[t]he conditions of housing and community life in the Bow neighbourhood served mainly as a political backdrop against which to measure the work's symbolic relevance […]' and was '[…] a stark comment on social realties' (2004, p. 21).

As a political piece it could have sparked debate and interest from local residents, however, significant to this piece of work was that the non-art public felt excluded as the majority of people felt that they didn't get its purpose. Critics described this as the "philistine reaction" to the work and the ones abandoned as "lost causes". The people who claimed to have understood the work were writers of essays – the art public. This situates *House* in a contentious position, but Kester does not suggest that Whiteread should have compromised her artistic methodology, but perhaps imagined an approach to working '[…] without dividing its audience into philistines and cognoscenti' (2004, p. 22). This is one of the concerns of artwork within the public domain, it invariably

becomes political due to is positioning, and the process and outcome is therefore debated on a higher level to work that sits within the confines of a gallery or theatre.

In contrast to *House* is *West meets East* (1992), which used textile and photomontage to create billboard pieces of art in the Docklands area of London. It serves as a counter to *House* in more ways than one, for example, firstly that it emerged from an extended dialogue and interaction with groups and individuals involved and therefore the piece created, and secondly it dealt with the local economy and industry. The factories and the production of textiles featured heavily in the composition of the piece and the area having a high population of Bengali informed its content. The Bengali cultural traditions were interwoven into the piece through textiles. At the time of its exhibit, racial tension was rife and the billboards created were vandalised twice, once again signifying the political overtones of public facing work.

Due to the language barrier of the participants involved, *West meets East* dealt with a visual communication, and Leeson worked with the community first, whereas with Whiteread the '[…] object came first […]' (2004, p. 24) which for Kester and many of the artists he discusses is the wrong way around for the projects to work and to be socially engaging. Furthermore, Kester explains how *West Meets East* posed a '[…] different set of demands on its audience and in the critic or historian […]' (2004, p. 24) to that of Whiteread's. Its direct participation arguably made it more accessible, and the process The Art of Change adopted was to firstly create a dialogue with local people, as opposed to Whiteread whose first priority was the object she was working with.

Kester is keen to explore what comparing conventional avant-garde and dialogical approaches to a similar site can reveal, and he asks the question, '[i]f it is possible to reclaim a less violent and more convivial relationship with the viewer while preserving the critical insights that aesthetic experience can offer to objectifying forms of knowledge' (2004, p. 27).

Referring to the British artist Peter Dunn, Kester notes his definition of his work, which interweaves with the work Kester discusses, as '[…] work involves the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations, well beyond the intuitional confines of the gallery or museum' (2004, p. 1). "Collaborative encounters" are the key words within this statement as it situates the work within the realm of a shared experience with the work of art and an exchange, rather than a hierarchical performer/audience relationship.

As a key methodological concern, I explored how this shared practice could feature in my work, and throughout my fieldwork I was interested in the relationship between oral histories in performance and attachment to place. Oral histories have been used as a methodology for artists to generate stories since the late 1960s; in 1973 the Oral History Society was established, marking a significant period for how information is gathered and for what purposes. The mid-eighties saw orality and performance become widely popular and practised.

In her book, *Remembering oral history performance*, Della Pollock notes that '[…] performance scholars/practitioners are increasingly discovering shared and

complementary investments in orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building

[…] or living history' (2005, p. 1). The idea of living history is defined as '[…] the

process of materializing historical reflections in live representation as both a form […]

and a means of social action' (2005, p.1). I define social action in this sense as a way to

bring about an awareness of issues related to community focused stories through the

mode of oral history.

Verbatim theatre is a prime example of how oral history/testimony has been used with

theatre to tell peoples' stories. How the artist then chooses to read the oral history and

what they then do with this information arguably defines the voice spoken and the

meaning behind it. The artist gives the voice context through the project they devise

with the voice and this in turn helps shape the identity of the place the voice is situated.

This was a concern of mine when creating the text for *Swanning Around Erdington.*

Lynn Abrams discusses oral history's relationship to performance in her book, *Oral*

*History Theory.* She notes,

> The performance-studies approach treats oral history as a social activity as such
> has much in common with the approach of ethnologists for whom the narrative
> is a living thing, with a purpose and a meaning (seldom fixed) that may be
> deployed in a variety of circumstances (2010, p. 140).

Oral history should, as Abrams notes be '[…] communicative […] with resonances

beyond the interview' (2010, p. 140). It should therefore be shared amongst those who

have a relationship with the spoken word. Oral history sharing has a ubiquitous quality

as it shares human voices and stories. The advantage of interpretation is discussed, and

Abrams concludes that the performativity of the visual and oral of the event allows the

researcher (or I would argue audience) the opportunity to read clues and thus interpret the piece of performance. When creating my walk I was concerned with the local stories and how the audience would interpret these. The stories on offer provide the spectator an insight into the history, and meaning is placed upon the event through both the visual and spoken word, and this is made even more prevalent once place comes into play.

If it is merely performed on a stage then place is arguably devoid or taken away from the event, but situate the performance within the place the oral history is speaking of and suddenly meaning and attachment is inherent to what is being heard. It is not enough to listen to the words of oral history, it must be placed within the context of the place it refers to or relate somehow directly to the person whom is speaking, only then is context and structure understandable to the listener and they too can play their part in its shaping and meaning. Oral history will in many ways resonate with more than the speaker – which is why they have delivered their story in the first place. In this case, the text needs to be situated within a context that allows people to identify and attach to. Place acts as a trigger for memory and attachment and oral history can act as an artistic tool to prompt that.

## 4.3: The making of *Swanning Around Erdington*

Taking these practices on board I examined my own choice of place and how to operate within it. Erdington was my chosen location for my performance walk as it has also been my hometown for the past four years and a place I hadn't particularly engaged with, something I wanted to change as I was aware that I would travel to Birmingham

rather than use local amenities.

Erdington is a suburb five miles North of Birmingham, '[t]here has been a village at Erdington since before Saxon times. By 1066 Erdington belonged to the estates of Edwin, Earl of Mercia'

> (http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-
> Erdington%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092730696&pagename=BCC%2FCommo
> n%2FWrapper%2FInlineWrapper).

Locally named "the village" which derives from its inception in the 9th century when settlers travelled up the river Tame, creating a small hamlet. Over the years it developed into a town, hosting a bustling centre with local businesses as well as larger mainstream shops.

*Swanning around Erdington,* as discussed in my introduction takes its name from a local market, one that used to be the central hub of Erdington, and has in recent years halved in size, cutting jobs and trade within Erdington. The walk was created for a new walking festival of Birmingham, *Still Walking.* The fact it was a trial festival is important, as it remains a relatively new concept within Birmingham. It was an experiment for me in the sense that I was investigating how to generate interest and collect stories from local people of Erdington, whilst keeping in mind the theories and concepts I had been exploring.

As a reference point I explored Shannon Jackson's *Social Works* (2011), which deals

with the idea of socially engaged art and she is interested in performance '[…] where […] aesthetic and social provocations coincide' (2011, p. 5). This is key to my practice and methodology, and finding the balance was integral to the shaping of my work.

Citing the works of Touchable Stories and Santiago Sierra, Jackson notes how they are both conflicting and comparable in their approach. Touchable Stories is a Boston based company, they work with particular community members to create maze like structures that audience can wander through and listen to oral histories and narratives collected from the participants. Santiago Sierra also works with communities but the differences lie in the process the artists go through. Sierra deals with the politics of exploited, marginalized communities, placing them as the subject of controversial art. For example, in *465 Paid People,* Sierra's 1999 piece saw 465 people standing in a museum's display area, waiting to be paid whilst spectators came through to watch. Contrastingly, Touchable Stories' director, Shannon Flattery places the marginalized communities at the heart of the subject matter, but through spending ample time researching and documenting the communities she creates work with. Their similarities lie in the idea of durationality; a concept Jackson explores as a social engagement tool, whether it is the time spent with participants or the time spent endured being the art. In *465 Paid People,* time denotes the endurance of the workers, and the work place and '[…] time and materials […] the notion of time as something bought comes […] startlingly into view […]. The piece exposed the degree to which time is already quite palpable to those who watch the clock for a living' (2011, p. 66). In Touchable Stories, time is measured through the duration spent before the project comes into fruition. Jackson argues that,

> […] we might notice that the durational commitment to shared time-space is a technique of the social artist, that is a commitment made whose consequences are unforeseen and – by virtue of an implicit social contract – will redefine the work's process and structure (2011, pp. 69 – 70).

In terms of measuring my own duration my research initially relied on books and Internet, I felt I needed the historical facts, such as the politics, demographics and ethnic breakdown, as well as facts relying on the origins of Erdington (even if these weren't going to feature in the outcome) in order to create a guided walk of a town. These facts gave me an overview of the town as a place, and the people I would speak to would give me context to the space in which I was to conduct the walk. I needed site visits to understand the town, the flow, the pace, and the people. I examined the traces left behind from people - litter, graffiti, posters, flowers, signs etc. These traces and field visits allowed some depth of understanding of a place and allowed me to understand the town. I wanted to get to know the area from the perspective of the local who uses it everyday, those who have intimate knowledge of its shortcuts, best places to shop, and the shopkeepers themselves. These visits were at times difficult depending on the day and time. One of my earliest visits was on a Monday in the early afternoon, the town was busy with people shopping and working, at first glance this was interesting as it presented me with a vision of a functioning place, I could examine the natural flow and pace of the town and use this for my walk. However, what proved difficult was talking to people and thus breaking their flow and routine. Shopkeepers were reluctant due to them being busy, shoppers were there to simply shop, and interrupting this was difficult. I was able to talk to a few people, I handed out a few questionnaires that I was able to retrieve on a later visit, yet I went with preconceived ideals that I would be able to collect countless anecdotes of living and growing up in Erdington.

The most productive early visit was venturing into a furniture shop that used to be a music venue in the last sixties/early seventies, called *Mothers*. I had read about it in a local magazine and was keen to place it in the walk as a key nostalgic point. The manager spoke to me at length about his own memories of growing up in Erdington. This was the first person I had spoken to, and I was encouraged, until I asked about sharing his stories on the walk and his response was that other people's stories would be much more interesting. This instantly made me realise the potential problem of the information gathering; no one thought his or her story was worth sharing.

*Still Walking* programmed my walk on a Sunday, and therefore I felt I was restricted to visiting the town and analysing the flow and pace to this day. The busyness of a town and consequently the flow and the pace of the walkers of a town are so different on this day, especially within a place that closes down on a Sunday, bar a few shops. The quietness and ghostly traces of a town remain, and the overall feel of it shifts, the empty shops and dilapidation of some of the buildings become more overt to the eye, and even though this wasn't a focus of the walk, it inevitably became an integral and inherent part of it, as it was unable to be ignored. The town's high street felt more like a liminal space than a functional town; this particular parameter would form part of the text and become a backdrop to the stories I would collect. The empty shops acted as frames to the stories, I was unable, and wouldn't want to ignore this.

As a means to collect local stories I borrowed from techniques explored by Jackson (2011) with companies like Touchable Stories, I visited the local library In Erdington for a coffee morning and met with some local people. This was the most effective

method of collecting memories as it created a dialogue with local residents.

Due to an impromptu visit I didn't record the voices, I therefore needed to rely on my own memory of what was said to write part of the walk's narrative, but still retain the sense of attachment to place and identity of the speaker. This became an important factor, the text I recorded and delivered to the audience was third hand, and I had heard it and written from memory my version of events. I then had an actor record it, who inevitably put their own interpretation on to the material, and then finally the audience heard it as a recording.

I was very much aware of the place I was to create the walk - a town that is functional, not a space that hosts street performances or guided walks. I wanted to remain sensitive to this and only use what the site presented me with; its physical structure, its people and its past and present. This is critical of practice that already exists and my provocation is a polemical view, yet when working within a community it is appropriate to rely on real life stories with moments of fictionality brought in, rather than bringing in too many theatrical devices such as stories and actors that could deflect from the sensitivities of the site.

Drawing inspiration from *Echoes from the Edge* (2009), A Friction Arts' performative installation situated in an old warehouse in Digbeth (a former industrial area of Birmingham). *Echoes from the Edge* reflected on different peoples' stories from the local area and culminated in a chronological exploration of the depicted stories chosen, with a celebratory community gathering at the end. I too wanted to generate a small

community, and the ending seemed like the time to focus on this as it allowed them to reflect on the whole walk. I hoped to bring the audience together and allow the time for people to talk to each other, perhaps share memories of their own town/city/village. My attempt for this was to be achieved through the audience making a street party scene, reminiscent of memories of Jubilee celebrations of 1977, as discussed working together to put bunting up, and eat and drink together.

Through making the walk I became aware that the narrative was at times disjointed, I needed to intertwine moments of history and stories together in a short time frame, relying on people and not facts. As a theatre maker I wanted to make the gathered stories flow and complement each other, I felt I needed a thread that connected them somehow. I experimented with my text, however this felt too imposed and alien within the real stories I was using, and it didn't fit within the model I was operating, although I had, as discussed written from memory an account I had heard.

Through the research I conducted I discovered an account of a murder that happened in the 1800s. This theme and event seemed to fit as a through-line to the walk as it gave the piece context and some distance from the inevitable present of the walk's happenings and presence of the audience. Many of the stories and opinions I collected from local residents were negative about the town; they spoke of how it has changed dramatically, how it has lost its identity through a constant shift of shops and the lack of government funding. It was difficult not to shy away from this, I didn't want to either, as it was a true reflection of the people I was in contact with. A concern was whether the native walkers of the town would overhear the text and be offended – I wasn't trying to

create a negative walk of Erdington, but instead reflect on the town's lost people/shops/memories etc., it just so happened that through the stories I collected the people were upset by the changes in the town, and felt that it had lost what it once was. Therefore, the story of Mary Ashford, a woman who was murdered seemed to fit as a thread, it acted as an allegory to the town's present.

**4.3 Choosing the sites**

Once I had created the text I needed to decide on the route. I wanted to cover as much of the high street as possible as a means for the audience to connect with the place, and I was aware of creating a guided walk, and therefore I wanted to cover as much ground as possible.

I began by walking up and down the high street, trying to find areas of interest that connected with the text I had, a route that was interesting, and one that reflected on what the town provided as a place. I took photographs of colours I saw, shops, litter, produce and monuments. The photos below depict a sample of my journey through the high street, each displaying a different set of demands on me as a performance maker.

*fig 1 Colours of Erdington*
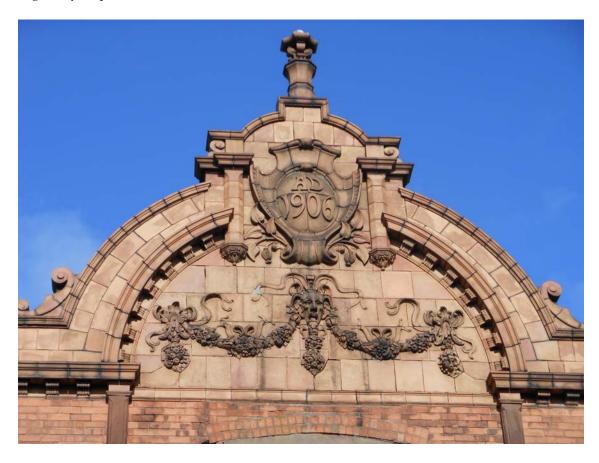


*Fig 2 A Bakery*

*Fig 3 Toyshop*



*Fig 4 The Library – This became the last point of the walk, hosting the street party.*

**4.4 The walk**

I created a guided walk that responded to the material I gathered, culminating in a 45-minute walk and an audience made street party. It reflected on the town's history, what has been lost and some views on its current state.

(I recommend watching *Swanning Around Erdington* here)

The walk began outside St Barnabas Church on the high street. I framed this as the place that is at the heart of a community, but posed the question of what has been the heart since the church was burnt down in 2007? The beginning of the walk was therefore very much in the present, but with reflections on the past. Here I introduced the audience to the idea of enclosing the town through looking at it through some picture frames that I gave out, this was to provide a personal vista and perspective on the town and look through one's own eye, rather than relying on the tour guide (me). This acted as handing over authority and authorship to the walker, rather than imposing my own agenda onto the audience.

The second site was a furniture shop that was once the club named "Mothers", this was a celebratory moment that shared fond memories of people visiting the club, describing its layout, the musicians, the smell and atmosphere. There was an element of feeling removed due to the lack of memorabilia and detachment from its past, and I therefore filled the space with loud music to create a sense of ambiance and make it feel less like an empty space.

The walk itself was filled with oral histories, audience were able to walk through the streets and listen to people talk on the dock, thus filling the streets with past and present voices, all reflecting on Erdington as a place.

Tied to some metal railings on the outside of an overgrown graveyard were old photographs of the past merged with the present. Audience were given the time to read and look at these as a poem about Mary Ashford was played on the dock. This allegorical method was employed to reflect on what has been lost and what has been retained within Erdington.

Further along the walk we positioned ourselves on the outside of a shutter that prevented us from entering a key shopping centre. We were looking through an enclosure which acted as a barrier in one sense, but then reminded us how a town's function on a Sunday used to be a day of rest. Upon reaching the market area the space itself was framed as a theatre space, we were contained within it whilst listening to voices passing commentary on the once bustling market.

The library area acted as a celebration space, and was very much in the present. The present day therefore bookended the walk, with moments of the past interweaved throughout. The street party was a chance for the audience members to contribute their own stories and memories. The question of what does community mean was posed, offering a starting point for people to begin conversing.

People spoke to me about how the walk allowed them to think of their own childhood

and their own hometown, it made them think of community and how important it is to try and keep these thriving.



*Fig 5 The street party*

The party was one of the most positive moments of the walk; the atmosphere was changed through the alteration of environment and mood, which made me think I could have had more moments like this to break up the walk and have moments that allowed the nuances of the street to happen around the audience.

The advertising I did do in the local library attracted two audience members, which was an important part of the project as I was able to talk to them about the town and understand their views and concerns, as well as their celebratory memories of Erdington. For me, the couple encapsulated whom the walk was for, their involvement and invested interest in the town and the content of the walk was what I had been aiming to find. The couple wanted to talk about the project and were genuinely interested and excited by the idea that Erdington had a guided walk happening. They spoke about their own experiences of working and living in Erdington, being part of the Church community and government schemes and problems within the town. Their over all tone was neither nostalgic nor negative, but a true and honest account of what the town is like. To echo David Crouch, 'Streets trigger memories' (1998, p. 163), which is precisely what this walk allowed the local couple to do.

Having more moments like the end street party could have also helped create a dialogue half way through the walk, allowing a moment to bring the walkers together and converse, rather than trying to impose that right at the end. I would keep the street party idea for the end as I think this added a surprise and created a celebratory feel, but perhaps having a refreshment stall planted within the walk would be an idea to try to engage the audience with each other during the walk rather than just at the end.

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**4.3: Evaluation and Conclusion**

My theoretical work investigated the notion that guided walks can work in the under-celebrated town, be seen and made by the local resident and be celebratory. I have explored contemporary artists working within the field of walking as art as a means to situate my methodology within a framework and as a point of departure. Nicola Shaughnessy notes Jen Harvie's claim that site specific work can act as an approach in forming a community, noting,

> [s]ite-specific performance can be especially powerful as a vehicle for remembering and forming a community for at least two reasons. First, its location can work as a potent mnemonic trigger, helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meanings of those times'
> (Harvie, 2005, p. 42 in Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 95).

In *Swanning Around Erdington,* I used both location and memory as triggers for remembering. This was evident in the furniture store that was once the Mothers club by placing memorabilia; posters, music and audio within the space. This acted as a device to invoke memory for local audience and create a sense of what the space once was for non-local audience. Furthermore, through the process of re-enactment in Mother's former site, I was able to transform it through a performative context, and as Shaughnessy notes,

> [f]or practitioners engaged in work that is participatory and socially engaged, the emphasis shifts from landscape (or what Kwon refers to as a 'phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site') to the lived experiences of the inhabitants within the places of performance. This often involves working in institutional or historical contexts, re-animating derelict sites through live art or producing performance in the context of working environments (industrial or social) (2012, p. 95).

Though I was not working within a derelict site I was re-animating a site through

imagining its past, and challenging how the spaces of the town could be experienced, '[c]ontemporary performance makers, I suggest, contribute to the process of making space meaningful through practices which explore (and challenge) how we experience the environment we inhabit' (2012, p. 113).

This research has presented an example of how performative guided walks can act as a means for artists to engage with communities, and vice-versa. Furthermore it has explored the broad field of how audience engage with performances and their role in the making of such works. Its main focus has relied on the idea of performance walks existing in the marginalised suburbs, and bringing about a sense of celebrated community cohesion through the idea that it is people, not landmarks that give place meaning.

Chapter one outlined traditional guided tours and how strategies have been borrowed and manipulated to suit a performative context, exploring the works of Wrights and Sites and Janet Cardiff. These practices present two approaches to working within areas that are not deemed as tourist sites, which in turn helped shape my methodology.

Chapter two explored the role of the audience, historicizing their position within broad fields of performance and exploring how their activity and participation within an event helps to generate material. Through engaging with projects such as *Linked* I was able to draw on the significance of the absent site, which was crucial to the development of my own practice, as I was able to re-imagine sites through memory, rather than work exclusively with the physical makeup.

Chapter three focused on empowerment and authorship of space, drawing on theorists such as David Crouch and Quentin Stevens, who both explore the notion of space and its function. The idea of playfulness and seeing site as something other than a functional space is what Stevens investigates through his theory, and although I was keen to implement this in my own practice, I was also aware of the negativity I received from my research. However, the local audience members on the walk were not deterred by the negative content, and found the process of Erdington having a guided walk a celebratory and cohesive experience.

Lastly, chapter four set out to examine and analyse my own practice and methodology, drawing on practices of socially engaged art as an avenue to begin shaping my own theoretical and practical processes. Drawing on works such as Touchable Stories and the Art of Change (Jackson, 2011 and Kester, 2004) have allowed me to re-examine how both space and spectatorship can be challenged to create material that seeks to question how that work is made.

On a final note, communities can only exist if there is a sense of ownership over space, and what I propose allows that authorship and thus allows for a sense of belonging. If the voices and eyes are disallowed a right to the space one occupies, then places potentially become void and characterless. This thesis has addressed whether local audiences can inform the content of a guided walk to reinforce a sense of community cohesion and celebration, and furthermore, it has interrogated the notion that an area possessing no formal tourism infrastructure can be a site for a community walk. *Swanning Around Erdington* was not inherently celebratory, but through drawing on

voices and reflecting past events, it highlighted the significance of site as a place of multiple narratives, and these stories derive from the local people who walk the streets, and thus write its text as de Certeau argues. Site and residents combined helped create a community walk that drew on issues, nostalgia and identity.

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**Appendices**

Fig. 1 – The colours of Erdington, taken on a reconnaissance of Erdington High Street
Fig. 2 – Bakery, taken on a reconnaissance of Erdington High Street
Fig. 3 – Toyshop, taken on a reconnaissance of Erdington High Street
Fig. 4 – The Library, taken on a reconnaissance of Erdington High Street
Fig. 5 – Street party scene, taken during *Swanning Around Erdington*. Photo credit: Ben
Waddington.