

Living Off the Enemy's Supply Lines: Developing 'mis-guidance' in heritage sites through the prism of one performance

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In this essay, from a position as participant or participant observer, I describe the emergence and development of an engagement with heritage narratives and spaces from within the site-based artists collective Wrights & Sites (Exeter, UK), influenced by the 'mainstream' guided tour and by the 'dark tourism' (abject, terrorising and apocalyptic) content of many of such tours, and informed by psychogeographical and mythogeographical walking arts (Smith 2010, 2014) and by site-specific theatre (Pearson & Shanks 2001; Pearson 2010). I pursue these developments until a single performance—*Water Walk*—draws together different strands of this development in a manner which suggests a new kind of relationship between performer/guide and tourist/audience.

Wright & Sites was formed in 1997 by playwright Cathy Turner, Stephen Hodge and Simon Persighetti who were making live art and visual theatre, and myself. At our first meeting we agreed to bid for a festival of site-specific performance. A year later, Wrights & Sites staged *The Quay Thing*, a festival of site-specific performances around Exeter's "historic" quay. Funded, mostly by Arts Council England to the tune of almost £100,000, the festival consisted of six full-length performances (we invited two guest producers to join us in creating one each) and a pilot performance created in four parts by us.

While we could draw on some experience negotiating access to public and private sites, we were not prepared for the virulent official responses our proposals would meet, nor for the volatility of what seemed, by all appearances, to be a rather benign tourism-inflected site, nor yet for the unnerving impact of

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working outside and exposed to public gaze both upon ourselves and upon the performers we employed for the festival.

The quayside at Exeter (Devon, UK) has been used at least since Roman times, though Hellenist coins discovered locally suggest a trade with the Mediterranean at least three centuries prior to Roman invasion. By the early medieval period, Exeter was an important port, despite the disruption of river traffic by landowners downriver who constructed weirs (partly to harness the water for mills, partly to favour their own quay at Topsham). In the mid-sixteenth century the Exeter Ship Canal was opened (long pre-dating Industrial Revolution canal building), bypassing the weirs; by the early eighteenth century Exeter was the third most significant trade centre in the country. Far from sources of coal and iron, it did not expand like many other towns and cities in the nineteenth century (Hoskins 1960).

This stasis provoked some anomalies; while the public politics of other nineteenth century cities saw great demonstrations of organised labour, Exeter's street politics were locked into the sectarianism of the Reformation with popular spectacles of religious public theatre as likely to morph into bread riots and pitched battles with the locally-based cavalry as into fireworks and bonfires (Smith 2004, 99-101). A local government dominated by brewers presided over infant mortality rates that exceeded others nationally; and a sophisticated and adventurous intellectual class, capable of innovative thinking—for example, the first proposals for an astro-archaeology that has only very recently become mainstream—was masked by the city's performance of itself as a provincial county town (*ibid.*, 109-110).

The Quay area reflects this history. The extravagant seventeenth century Custom House is not matched by voluminous nineteenth century warehouses or twentieth century cranes. Modest bonded warehouses have been converted into offices and the small fish market stands empty. The area was used as a location for the original 'Poldark' TV series.

Nowadays there is no commercial shipping on the Quay or Ship Canal. Its last manifestation was the "shit boat" (officially the 'Countess Weir', an echo of those medieval disputes over control of the river) that carried the city's human waste out to the open sea until 1997. Today the Quay is primarily a leisure and tourism designated site (restaurants, water-based sports activities, climbing centre, and so on) with sporadic bouts of speculative residential property construction. In the words of Simon Persighetti, "[W]e chose this location because it seemed to us that it presented many possibilities because of its history; its crucial trade role in the development of the city; its contemporary use as a work and leisure space; its mix of ancient and modern architecture; its busy and abandoned buildings" (2000, 12).

As Wrights & Sites began to develop plans for its festival, the contested nature and representational status of this site became increasingly clear. Having

received a warm and encouraging reception by City Council arts officers, we were shocked by the animosity of elected members. It was whispered to us that our festival was considered an attempt to upstage the council’s *Exeter Festival* or interfere in sensitive planning issues around the development of the Quay.

We had hoped to use the then empty and redundant Isca building, a former civic electricity generating station, for our pilot performance. We were discreetly informed that publicly owned buildings were off limits to us. The announced dates for the festival were approaching and we were running out of options. We took to the water, hiring the services of the then river pilot who ran his own ferry service between the Quay, the Canal Basin and the Double Locks pub on the Ship Canal (a journey of about two miles). We thus staged our ‘pilot’ performance—*Pilot Navigation*—aboard the ferry, around the ferry’s embarkation point on the Quay (close to the former bonded warehouses) and on the tow paths alongside the canal. The audience viewed mostly from the boat except at the ‘Double Locks’ where there was a break for drinks and the use of the toilets. The event lasted two hours.

For this pilot performance we settled on a ‘Happenings’-type structure that we have used many times since: autonomous compartments within an overall pattern. Each of us was allotted a portion of the journey along the quay/canal and back, while the performance content for that time and space was entirely the choice of the individual concerned. We constructed four separate, mostly successive, sometimes over-lapping sequences. Initially, there was an idea for two of the streams (Simon’s and mine) to be woven in a sinusoidal wave pattern, but this did not work out and we went back to a more fully compartmentalised structure. All the sequences were devised with, and for, the same four performers; except for Stephen and Cathy’s segments which overlapped, with Stephen using one performer and Cathy three. I devised the first sequence which began at the Quay, Simon took over as the boat landed close to the Double Locks, Cathy then created a piece for the return journey while Stephen’s single performer walked just ahead of the boat hammering stakes with placards into the ground alongside the canal, each one showing a fragment of overheard conversation collected on the canal bank.

Both Cathy’s and my sections of *Pilot Navigation* directly referenced tourism and the local heritage industry. In Cathy’s strand, a tour guide, dressed in smart mustard blazer and deploying jovial banter, used the ferry boat’s PA to deliver an invented narrative about a painter struggling to break away from romantic tropes of landscape representation by painting electricity pylons. Members of the audience were given empty rectangular wooden frames, like picture frames, and were encouraged to ‘capture’ portions of the passing landscape. Similarly, the tour guide served as a ‘framing’ of this strand. Introduced at the last moment by Cathy this had a particular dynamism: “Her commentary became increasingly bizarre, increasingly suggesting that she was inventing as she went along. This

threw the artist’s authoritative appropriation of the place into question, while suggesting the pleasure of spontaneous fictionalisation” (Turner 2000, 31-32).

There was already a tension between the unseen painter’s taped voice-over about his struggle to break from romanticist norms and staged tableaux on the canal bank: a drowned Pre-Raphaelite ‘Ophelia’; a muse, dressed in a pylon-like gown, playing a violin. More radical, though, were jarring breaks in representation; the audience, at the guide’s behest making their own ‘pictures’, at odds with the sole gaze of the fictional painter, and then, the challenge to subjective framing in general as the guide’s account became increasingly fanciful, unstable and self-reflexive. There was no final reliable frame.

My own onboard tour guide persona, ‘The Mis-Guide’—from which we took the name for later *détournée* performance walks—similarly challenged official representations of the waterside environment and its history, deploying revelation, critique and irony in order to expose and celebrate patent contradictions, absurdities and hypocrisies in the conventional narratives, overloading these narratives with multiple and diverse layers so that any point of view became a queasy one. I would later formalise this tension between ‘standard’ and ‘mis-guided’ tour narratives in “The Mis-Guided Tour and the Standard Tour” (Smith 2009), but at the time it came about more through improvised responses than strategic engagement with dominant narratives.

My ‘Mis-Guide’ monologues over the PA system covered subjects that transgressed the official narratives of the Quayside and Canal, including some of terror: the beheading of a favourite of Henry VIII’s who was involved in blocking trade on the river, scenes from Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula’ set in Exeter, and the use in 1956 of the canal as a test site for X-Submarines intended to deploy nuclear devices as part of Operation Cudgel in the ports of Russian cities. The X-Craft story would be replicated, with different particulars, multiple times as I would later move on to work on solo projects. In apparently benign heritage sites, I would repeatedly find hidden narratives of apocalypse, secret mass-burial, globally significant transformations and bodies in chaos (for one example: “A la Ronde” [Smith 2011]); a common unstable quality I would later identify as part of a *chora*.

A series of enforced last minute decisions had led us onto the fluid ‘stage’ of the ferry boat. Cathy boldly embraced its volatile potential, introducing unreliable framings (even, at the last moment, a wobbly verbal meta-frame: “If the river had a spirit.... I ain’t got any fancy thoughts like that.... Please leave the frames behind, but take the pictures home with you” [Turner 2000, 29 - 33]). While I disrupted expectations of a low key, provincial narrative, Cathy created a more sophisticated dramaturgy, which not only subjectivised the representation and narrating of the landscape, but, by allowing her tour guide’s commentary to lose certainty and authority, challenged the stability of the audience’s subjective authorship of their own alternatives.

After *Pilot Navigation*—our work now considered sufficiently abstruse not to constitute a political threat, perhaps—we gained permission to perform in locations owned by, or under the purview of, the city council: the Isca Building, a former fish warehouse, a section of the boatyard and the ruins of the first stone bridge over the River Exe. For the ‘main season’, Stephen Hodge and Simon Persighetti created full length performances for the Isca Building; in relation to its history Simon sought a similar reflexivity of narration and authority as Cathy had in the pilot performance; he wrote of how he intended the audience “to experience the feeling we [his performers and himself] had of being trespassers in another’s history.... During the performance, one of the worker/performers senses that she is being watched by ‘intruders’. In that moment audience and performers are implicated in the act of trespass” (2000, 21).

After *The Quay Thing* and a few smaller scale performance projects, Wrights & Sites increasingly moved away from formal performances, concerned that despite their warm reception by audiences, performances often obscured their sites rather than illuminated them, dragging focus to human-centred narratives or to images created by intervention rather than by the site itself. Instead, the group expanded the part of its process that involved the ambulatory seeking for performance sites. Wrights & Sites shifted to a walking arts practice. Its explorations often still had performative qualities, ritual moments and narratives which were documented and shared. Partly inspired by the *dérive* of the International Lettristes/Situationists, these walks often began with an agreed theme or at an unusual starting point or time and were guided by unplanned discoveries, shifts from one ambience to another, chance encounters with people and terrains, and emerging narratives.

Wrights & Sites began to take invited groups on re-walkings of some of these explored routes. On these walks, members of the company took something like a guiding role, at the very least in terms of re-finding the route. In 2003, the company explored this emerging guiding role (but no longer as fictional personae as in *Pilot Navigation*) in a project called *Lost Tours*. This consisted of ten ‘drifts’ or walks in Exeter and its hinterland, including a ‘gendered walk’ in which two groups (one female, one male) visited city centre locations during one night, a navigation of the sensitive boundaries at an allotment and a ‘drift’ to the tops and bottoms of public and private buildings.

Two of the ten walks explicitly focused on tourism/heritage themes; a day’s exploration looking for connections to Ancient Egypt and *The Lost Mis-Guide* which saw Simon Persighetti standing in the city centre, dressed in cap and uniform with ‘Lost Tours’ logo, offering ‘free mis-guided tours of the city’. This “led to a series of encounters/conversations about local history, tourism, changes in the city. In such a situation, the ‘actor’ quickly becomes the observer of the performance of everyday life, a reversal of reception takes place” (Wrights & Sites 2003, n.p.). From our project report, it is clear that, despite its whimsicality, this

was an experiment informed by a politics of guiding in which the group increasingly found itself entangled: the 'walk' had "provide[d] pointers for the ways in which the mis-guide may be able to create opportunities for discoveries in a leading-out (*educare*) manner rather than through the established didactic role of the tourist guide" (ibid., n.p.).

The company then drew upon material generated by the ten walks to create three guided tours offered over one evening. Reflecting on these tours, the company described a shift it felt it had made from earlier *dérive*-like walks to planned walks that were still open to upsets in interpretation. Its report outlines a self-subverting and uncomfortable process, not unlike the undoing of the authoritative voice by Cathy Turner in *Pilot Navigation*: "[P]laying upon the contradiction of tour-guides who admit to being lost, out of place, discovering rather than repeating only the known or documented evidence of place.... [T]he spectator may begin a journey in an assumed contract as tour-ist.... By degrees, this relationship is undermined or challenged by considering everything on the journey to be part of a continuum, part of the 'optic and aural-flow' available to all sighted and hearing creatures, not accessible to guides or mis-guides alone" (ibid., 8).

Blue Boy Walks (2004) was the last substantial ambulatory performance project that Wrights & Sites would take on before the accumulative impacts of academic careers, solo performance practices and an increasing interest in creating handbooks of its practices made such collective projects impractical. Though there was not the upsetting of the guiding role that had characterised some of our previous projects, there was still some innovative engagement with heritage narrative, notably in Stephen Hodge's audio-walk for an Exeter Blitz anniversary night, when participants walked for the same duration as the night time raid in the part of city centre bombed most heavily, while listening to a recording comprising of smashing crockery timed with the fall of each bomb and to the recital of marginalia from a copy of proposals for Exeter's post-war reconstruction (*Exeter Phoenix* [1946]).

In the years following 2004 I worked on a number of solo performance projects where I shifted more towards guiding roles, making site-based, often anecdotal performances and walking performances that continued to play with multiple layers of meaning. These were often performed in tourism and heritage contexts. It was only when I began to work on two new projects in partnership with Wrights & Sites' member Simon Persighetti, however, that I was able to draw once again not only on the hidden, abject, terrorizing and eschatological subjects of the heritage industry (cholera outbreaks and the conspiracy theories they provoked, rumoured secret Muslim wives of ex-colonials, and so on) but also to draw the guiding role into a reflexive instability. The longer of these two projects, 'Sardine Street', which lasted, on and off, for three years, has been documented at length elsewhere (*Crab Man e3 Signpost* [2012]); the shorter project, *Water Walk*, introduced quite new elements.

Water Walk was performed only once around the West Quarter and Quay-side of Exeter on the evening of April 28th 2010. It was commissioned by Spacex Gallery to accompany their *Random Acts of Art* residency and exhibition. It addressed various water-related themes, particularly the role of water in the social and industrial history of the area. It lasted approximately 90 minutes. One immediately new element was that *Water Walk* was created during the three years of my doctoral research conducted into the effectiveness of my ambulatory performances in manifesting and communicating the mythogeographical principles on which I claimed them to be based. *Water Walk* was attended, along with other members of the public, by 9 members of my 60-strong volunteer panel (recruited mostly from among audience members for previous walks and heritage industry officials) who were invited to attend such performances and, when attending, asked to respond to a questionnaire or to write a response by email.

My involvement began when Simon passed on an invitation from Spacex Gallery at a meeting of Wrights & Sites. On February 1, Simon emailed the members of Wrights & Sites with a reminder. I was the only member to respond. To his reminder Simon had appended a provisional suggestion:

The walk begins with the filling of a bucket with water at the White Hart [a pub] and carrying it with the help of participant/walkers around the locality eventually pouring it down Stepcote Hill. The walk would then continue down to the river through the missing Watergate to collect a bucket of Exe River water. The river water would then be carried back through the quarter to the White Hart. (email message to author, January 1, 2010)

Simon's suggestion was similar to certain self-cancelling processes that I had previously criticised, specifically in relation to Richard Long's work *Crossing Stones* (1987) (Smith, "The Contemporary Dérive." 2010, 108). Nevertheless, I responded positively to the idea as a starting point rather than a finished score, explaining that I had recently created a walk tracing water sources and routes around the West Quarter and Quay for Exeter families of mixed heritage (*Exe-Pedition*, Blazing Tales 2009). In my email response I shared some of the research for this walk as possible source material for the new walk:

13th/14th centuries—residents of the upper West Quarter—around Smithen Street were allowed to throw water over certain church processions... During the cholera (water born) outbreak in 1832 the people of the West Quarter rioted on a number of occasions to prevent bodies from being carried away—(some believed that people were being buried alive). (February 1, 2010)

When Simon responded, he picked up on the content suggestions: '[B]ecause of time restraints I am thinking of keeping it pretty simple but indeed framing the walk/action around the various watery histories of West Quarter makes sense' (February 1, 2010).

Towards the end of March, Simon reiterated the need for simplicity: "In

terms of info during the walk I AM STILL VEERING TOWARDS A FAIRLY SIMPLE RITUALISED WALK (Sprinkling and Pouring water) with minimal commentary" (email message to author, March 23, 2010). The following week we met and for a day walked possible routes around the West Quarter. Given our general practice of *dérive*, our explorations were characterised by tangential exploration. I listed in an email (April 8, 2010) the spaces I had responded positively to: a redundant public clothes drying area, a maze, the bricked up former water gate in the city wall, a swan mural, the Exe Bridges (remains of a medieval bridge), a mill leat and the drainage channel in the centre of the steep cobbled surface of Stepcote Hill. I listed a set of possible 'ritual' actions: washing some cloth and hanging it up to dry, making a tableau on Stepcote Hill to recreate an engraving from a local physician's publication on a nineteenth century cholera epidemic (*The History of the Cholera in Exeter in 1852 1849*), cutting up onions to make ourselves cry, walking the maze, pouring something off the suspension bridge, drinking tea, collecting urine from a house (a common practice in the area during the cloth trade, for use as an astringent), baptising/not baptising, having water thrown over us.

On our exploratory 'drift' we came up with the idea of prefacing the walk with a lecture that would convey any necessary historical information *before* we set off, avoiding having to interrupt any 'ritualistic' actions on site; emphasising a sensual engagement while giving enough information to convey something of the site's specificities. In an email after the exploratory walk I suggested that the "lecture feels like an action for 'getting rid of' the notion of 'tour guide' so that we can do something else this time" (April 8, 2010).

As I began to write and compile text for the performance and an accompanying pamphlet, I described for myself how my experience on *The Quay Thing* had "encouraged a paranoid sense of the area, a hypersensitivity (with a sensual overload), an insight into the darkness and violence that seemed to pervade the place: of property development and unspoken plans, of violent leisure, homelessness and anger" (unpublished notes 2010, n.p.). I suggested, rhetorically, that site-specific work in such a place did not simply produce an external aesthetic product, but "a remaking of the walking body, generating a new, mutant strain of organs specific to the West Quarter" (ibid., n.p.).

Simon pointed out that the route we had provisionally devised had the shape of a sinusoidal wave (the shape he and I had aspired to make for *Pilot Navigation*) and listed ten stopping places and short actions: filling buckets at the White Hart, soaking cloth at the leat, pouring water into the river from the pedestrian suspension bridge, a water pistol fight at the Water Gate, and so on. He suggested that "10 water actions" should be matched by "a maximum of 10 X one-minute sections for the lecture" (email to the author, April 8, 2010).

Three days later I elaborated on how the lecture might serve a mis-guided tour by negating the usual narrative, and how *Water Walk* was developing into a new kind of tour:

the mis-guided tour.... rests on the multiplicity of place in tension with the mono-vocality of the traditional tour guide (and the subversion of the tradition[al] guiding voice, or at least fore-fronting in the form of the mis-guide). But there is a danger that both elements become too separated and sustain each other (rather than one eat into the other).... I think there was something very strong in your initial idea for Water Walk that was getting away from this: it was a move away from the guide’s narrative and towards a set of actions. But more than that, I wonder if it is a move towards something which the ‘mis-guided tour’ implicitly aspires to and yet has only (mostly) gestured towards.... dispersal of action among all those on the tour. Can we use your basic, initiating idea and its anti-authoritative quality? So that we all – us and the walkers – make the actions together? In that way, the preparatory ‘lecture’ isn’t really a lecture, but a briefing.... [S]o they understand.... multiple resonances. Then we all carry the water, we all drink tea, we all throw water at some image of authority....

Have we got here a new kind of mis-guided tour? (email from the author, April 11, 2010)

Simon responded on the same day, referencing the idea of the ‘actor as signpost’ (Smith 2009), the carrying of a door through streets, homes and gardens for his performance *Walking Newtown* (2003) and our audience sharing the burden of the ‘relics box’ in *A Tour of Sardine Street* (2010): “in terms of PARTICIPATION YES I AGREE” (email to the author, April 11, 2010).

The *Water Walk* was attended by approximately twenty people who gathered in the The White Hart Hotel’s Bacchus Bar where we performed the lecture. We began dressed in matching blazers, holding folders like those carried by Exeter’s municipal Red Coat Guides. Simon sang from *The Water-Seller’s Song in the Rain*, lyrics by Bertolt Brecht, we welcomed the audience and contextualised our own involvement: “(T)he West Quarter is a special place for us. We made some of our earliest site-specific performances here. And we want to be specific to the Quarter tonight. Specific to some terrible things”. We briefly introduced the histories of industrial exploitation, poverty and displacement by ‘slum clearance’ from the West Quarter: “(S)ome of that suffering—like the cholera epidemics—we will be tracing in water... To mark [the] absence (of the West Quarter’s residents)... we are going to remove many of the usual accoutrements of our Mis-Guided Tours”. We then listed those elements and actions we would be excluding: pointing, blazers, funny stories, personal anecdotes and associations, jokes about Health and Safety, historical information, folders, instructions and the folding of any early offhand remarks back into the tour at a

later point (for example, instructions for crossing roads folded back in an account of a pedestrian death).

We listed nineteen places or narratives we would not be pointing to, though by doing this we were conveying information about them: "the flayed corpse of Bishop Blaize, Romany Rye, the secret tunnel to the Bishop's Palace, Artful Thomas and the nuclear bunker". Peppered by absurdities and abjections, and hints of apocalypse (once again), was a dire and poisonous narrative of epidemics, extreme poverty, the physical collapse of homes, extreme martyrdom, and so on; a site of seemingly stable and comfortable heritage quickly revealed its narratives of terror.

We physically demonstrated the pointing we would not be doing, removing our blazers as Simon spoke of the disposal of clothes during the cholera outbreaks. To exorcise funny stories, I told a 'funny story' about the collapses of houses in the West Quarter killing entire families. Exorcising associations, Simon told the story of the asphyxiation of two men in the well of the White Hart "by a Cockatrice".

When disposing of instruction-giving, we contradicted ourselves (again):

we do actually have an instruction – or at least a request – we'd like you all to walk in silence – because although things have been written about the people of the West Quarter.... very little... of their own voices was ever recorded..... we can't pretend that brings back their voices.

Simon then led the audience through the pub's 'Secret Garden' where buckets were filled with water and handed to the audience. I handed blazers and other props to the pub reception and took up a framed engraving of a scene on Stepcote Hill during the 1832 cholera epidemic. Processing it like an icon. We then walked through the West Quarter. From the remains of the City Wall we viewed, from above, a maze in the locked grounds of Cricklepit Mill. At Cricklepit Leat we washed some purple material in a bucket and then handed the wet material to the participants to carry. In a disused modern collective drying area we hung up the dripping purple cloth. The walkers were given the option of talking, but many chose to stay silent throughout.

At the pedestrian suspension bridge over the River Exe the group split in two, half to empty purple dye-stained water into the river (from the bridge), the rest to a pier by the Quay's former Fishmarket to recapture the discoloured water from the river. Then the two groups met up again and went to the remnants of the Water Gate in the City Wall where Simon broke ice from a mould; inside the ice was a toy car. We processed to Exe Bridges, where all were invited to wash their faces. Then to a cul-de-sac where a bucket of water was sold to an unsuspecting resident for one penny. On Stepcote Hill we collectively recreated the image from the engraving I was carrying, throwing water down the medieval drainage channel. Outside the Buffet City Chinese Restaurant, in view of the restaurant's waterfall, the group drank rice wine and crossed to the former site

of a medieval close where, breaking our rule against contextualising sites, we explained that residents had once had the right to douse certain religious processions. The audience threw water over me as I processed the engraving. What water remained in the buckets was thrown down the hidden route of a long-culverted stream, and after pamphlets describing the making of the walk were distributed, all were invited to join us for a drink in The White Hart pub.

The panellists’ responses to this walk, by email or questionnaire, noted our stripping away of tour guide tactics and artefacts, but also how the guiding role had returned spectrally: “[T]he studied putting down and leaving behind... make me doubly aware of the vestiges of guiding that remained” (Panel Questionnaire F. 2010, n.p.), “[Y]ou are still our guides” (Panel Questionnaire I. 2010, n.p.). We had performed a double-movement of exorcism and retention of the guiding role. A number of the participants described the change effected by this ‘exorcism’:

One of the reasons I think that the walk really allowed me to meet each experience on offer at that moment in time rather than hold onto one in particular and allow that to colour the rest of the walk, is the subtle framing that happened in the pub introduction. (Panel Questionnaire D. 2010)

The decision to read the information beforehand gives the opportunity for the place to tease itself out. This allows the overall sensory perception of the place to become less distracted and therefore reduces the sense of dislocation. (Panel Questionnaire B. 2010)

...the shedding of the Rotary Club style jackets... prepared us for the transition from audience to participants. (Panel Questionnaire G. 2010)

The panel respondents repeatedly referred to a kind of fecund instability on the walk: “(I)deas floated between us” (Panel Questionnaire B. 2010, n.p.); “the rhythm of the walk was fluid like water” (Panel Questionnaire A. 2010, n.p.); “permitted and encouraged space for the shifting of meaning” (Panel questionnaire D. 2010, n.p.). The walk was an invitation to experience through affect rather than information transfer: “great sadness” (Panel Questionnaire G. 2010, n.p.); “sadness and melancholy” (Panel Questionnaire H. 2010, n.p.); “[Y]ou allow feelings to be felt. You allow us to touch, and be touched by, the past.... to feel it for ourselves” (Panel Questionnaire I. 2010, n.p.); “you return to a child like curiosity” (Panel questionnaire I. 2010, n.p.).

These responses conformed to the perception of *chorastic* space in heritage sites described by Stephen Wearing, Deborah Stevenson and Tamara Young, a space of “movement, destination, experience, memory and representation... also... of desires, fantasy, creativity, liminality, reordering and enchantment” (2009, 10); “realms” that put tourists and tourism in a space of instability, a kind of pre-place, a space of apprehension. Wearing, Stevenson and Young use the term *chora* as a corrective to the contemplative passivity and the prioritising of visuality in the *flâneur/flânerie* metaphors for the tourist and tourism space.

Wearing, Stevenson and Young's *chora* is an intermediary space between existence and becoming, similar to that characterised by Elizabeth Grosz as "space that engenders without possessing, that nurtures without requirements of its own, that receives without giving, and that gives without receiving, a space that evades all characterisation including the disconcerting logic of identity, of hierarchy, of being, the regulation of order" (1995, 51). While this characterisation veers towards replacing the dispassionate and authoritative essentialism of the *flâneur* with a mystical essentialism, it encompasses a space of transformation, a resistance to exchange (in the sense of a refusal of both commerce and the obligation of 'the gift', a refusal of reciprocity) and performs an *evasion* (rather than absolute or violent dissolution) of identities and hierarchy; rather as the lecture in *Water Walk* sought to evade the authoritative voice by under-performing it. This notion of evasion, as well as the idea of being suspended between two states, suggests that this is not a permanent quality, but rather a transitory and temporary space that might need to be provoked into being or sought out within apparently unpromising spaces.

Chora applied in two ways to *Water Walk*: firstly, as the precondition for the 'becoming' into participation that panellists reported experiencing. Secondly, as an explanation for how *Water Walk*'s audience self-consciously reconstituted themselves as makers of heritage meaning, including for some the self-conscious reconstitution of their touristic selves: "[T]he mechanics of the process were not only on show, but we were actually part of it and constructing it through our actions" (Panel Questionnaire D. 2010, n.p.). Although there was some of the setting loose of multiple narratives usual for a 'mis-guided' tour, far more pronounced was the sense of a deferred space of disruption of its own disruption, sustaining a guided tour seemingly free of its own tactics.

This guiding without tactics fore-fronted to its audience how the walk was sustained as much, if not more, by the assumptions and work of its audience/participants as by its guides, and indeed allowed for some self-mythologization on the part of the audience/participants, transferring the disruption of the tour to a disruption of themselves: "my understanding of the West Quarter is not formed solely by what *you* chose to tell/show us, but rather, has been informed/changed/morphed by my re-walking, re-telling and remembering" (ibid.), "the performance allows us to be engaged in a deeper way that allows for our own interpretation in quieter ways that engage our curiosity and make us think in new ways" (Panel Questionnaire I. 2010, n.p.).

A number of respondents were conscious of a change in their way of making meaning: "[Y]ou see and feel in a different way. You read your own thoughts" (ibid.); "made me question our understanding of site and history in a much larger way which is not restricted to Exeter... not a case of swapping one mode of perception for another, rather that my understanding and engagement with places of heritage will be plural and far more open to changing, rather than try-

ing to ‘fix’ a particular understanding” (Panel Questionnaire D. 2010, n.p.). The participants had observed their own production of place and history. Here was perhaps the key novelty and qualitative leap in *Water Walk*: an opportunity for its participants to engage (with subjective variations) with what Raymond Williams had called “structures of feeling” (1997, 133-134); formative processes for shared values and collective emotions and experiences, prior to their assemblage as ideology, which though unformed in terms of material expression or detailed theorisation, are nevertheless capable of being shared and dispersed. *Water Walk* had moved onto a *chorastic* antecedent space, a space that allowed both ‘mis-guide’ performer and participant to do work upon their “structures of feeling”, upon the production of their collective feelings and ideas, while alerted and sensitised to the process in operation. By acknowledging and triggering the *chora* inherent in the touristic and heritage place, the tour revealed the pre-condition for its emergence as an ‘anywhere’, a place of hybrids, assemblages and evaded orders; where time might be made a non-sense of, where a visitor for once stops trying to make things fit the dominant narrative, where “(T)he layered and fragmented nature of the walk, along with your choice of texts, permitted and encouraged space for the shifting of meaning” (Panel Questionnaire D. 2010, n.p.).

This experience appears to have been at least temporarily sustainable and ‘returnable to’; one panel member (D) refers to returning to the site with friends, another comments on only being able to return to the Quarter “for specific reasons. I suppose it is because of the ritualistic nature of the walk” (Panel Questionnaire B. 2010, n.p.). In antithetical ways these two panel members describe the same phenomenon—the latter describing a “shared understanding that cannot be reiterated by myself, only with others who experienced it” (ibid.), the former the “connecting (of) all the experiences... happen[ed] in the days following... as I re-walked some of those routes and described it to others... informed/changed/morphed by my re-walking, re-telling” (Panel Questionnaire D. 2010, n.p.)—what is common is not the replacement of one kind of information by another, but a social deferral of synthesis as a means to preserving multiplicity against a return to homogeneity, holding open the process of meaning-formation for re-walking and re-telling.

The conclusion I drew from all this was that the motor for the development and dispersal of a critical, agentive and mythogeographical engagement with heritage narratives was not primarily down to any particular mode of performance, but the antecedent, *chorastic* space within the place of a heritage site. And that for finding/generating this space in such places, there was a repeatable site-based strategy of mythogeographical intervention by upset, unfamiliarity and juxtaposition (the familiar unveiling of hidden abject and apocalyptic content), then, by the disrupting of those disruptions (in this case the lecture that de-performed the heritage narration), and then, again, by continuing to work

through the remaining spectral narrative revenant (in our case, silent procession and semi-ritualised tour-like actions) to a sustained *chorastic* moment.

This challenged any distinction within the dispersal of tactics between tourists and artists; any dispersal should supply both with the same tools for the preparation of *chora* rather than re-introducing those distinctions between art and life that many from whom mythogeography has drawn (Alan Kaprow, Stewart Home, Dada, Lettristes and International Lettristes [Smith, “The Contemporary Dérive.” 2010, 103-122]) have fought to dispel. Similarly, these findings caused me to reconsider the sharp distinction that I had made previously between the ‘standard tour’ and the ‘mis-guided tour’. In mid-2011 I read Jane Widtfeldt Meged’s PhD Thesis *The Guided Tour—a Co-Produced Tourism Performance* (2010) in which she concludes by directly challenging my “sharp dichotomy between a ‘standard tour’ and a ‘Mis-guided Tour’”, describing how she had personally observed critical guides on “standard tours” reflecting with tourists on sensitive subjects, and other guides who immersed the tourists in the performance and even made them sing (2010, 217), and drawing attention to other crossover points such as improvisation, the recruitment of accidents to meaning, use of secondary actors and referencing subjective associations and reflections.

While I had expended a great deal of energy in attempting to subvert, *dé-tourn*, disrupt and redeploy the ‘standard’ tour, I was increasingly struck by how often I have been able to put to apparently ‘mis-guided’ use what are conventional tactics of the standard pedestrian tour: starting and stopping, the repeated interruption of a walk, segmentation of static commentary and ambulatory silence, the use of other actors in ‘walk-on’ roles, ‘seductive strategies’ (including a rhetorical strategy and a strategy of intimacy) (ibid., 109-110), and the re-channelling of ‘standard’ tour group behaviours including what Meged describes as a “*participatory tactic*”, in which a tourist “would start discussions with the guide, and... offer alternative explanations” (ibid., 61), “a *partial tactic*... sharing their attention between the guide and something else” (ibid., 61-2), an “*alternative tactic*... performing the guided tour by themselves or in interaction with other actors” and the “switch between... tactics constantly... the tourists *log on to and off from the guiding* while simultaneously engaging in multiple activities” (ibid., 62).

Some academic accounts of the guided tour have emphasised the authority and freedom of the mainstream tour guide. Aviva Geva and Arie Goldman, following J. Christopher Holloway’s assertion that “the guiding role is not yet institutionalized, and remains open to interpretation by guides and passengers alike” (1991, 377), argue that tour guides operate in a privileged ‘gap’ between tourists and sponsoring institutions, often to the disadvantage of the latter (ibid., 177-179). Heidi Dahles suggests that, even in heavily policed contexts, guides are ‘entrusted with the public relations missions to.... be a window onto a site, region, or country’ (2001, 783-784). More recently, however, Mikael Jonasson has emphasised, like Meged, that such authority and agency, where it exists, is

negotiated by the guide, sometimes with institutional partners, but always with their tour party members who jointly re-create each tour as "a mobile production... through co-optive making" (2009, 31). Jonasson describes this emerging tour as one that "handle[s] visible and invisible, past and present" (ibid., 35), addresses "missing pieces" and "representational silences" (ibid., 36), and speeds up and slows down to make a "rhythmic landscape" (ibid., 45). All of which offer the mis-guide further affordances from within the 'standard tour', but also suggest that an understanding of the 'standard' tour as having flexible and reflexive characteristics poses a greater challenge for disruption.

In *Water Walk* Simon Persighetti and I were, simultaneously, more conventional and more radically upsetting the 'standard' tour's conventions than in previous work. We used the conventional stop and start, but cut out the static commentary (condensing it into the preliminary lecture), we over-exaggerated the segmentation (compartmentalisation) of the different tactics, engaged with picnickers on the river bank and a resident to whom we sold a bucketful of water as 'other actors'. We employed rhetorical strategies such as "*Logos*... the appeal to reason and logic" (Meged 2010, 113) (we explained the reasoning behind our stripping away of tactics), "*Pathos*... the appeal to the feelings and emotions of the audience" (ibid., 113) (we evoked suffering and loss in the historic West Quarter), and "*Ethos*... the appeal to ethics and morality" (ibid., 113-114) (we narrated the immorality of brewers and mill owners who profited by the West Quarter yet did little to alleviate its squalor). We asked the tour group to participate in carrying, washing, tipping and collecting water, to simultaneously pay attention to us and something else, and gave space for them to interact with each other rather than us. We sought to move them between different states of engagement; first standing back to allow the group to interact with picnickers, then drawing them away with the icon.

What this constituted was the emergence of a generalising tactic of 'living off the enemy's supply lines'; not only drawing upon standard historiographical research to seek out excluded, abject, terrorising and apocalyptic contents, but directly redeploying technical elements from mainstream tour-guiding to simultaneously destabilise the discreteness of the tour and take advantage of its most effective elements. It also constituted a significant double movement, more complex than the simple fragmentation of an authoritative voice or the accumulation of a multiplicity; tour guiding was evoked, traduced, exorcised and returned to in a ghostly and transparent manner.

This would soon become the pattern for my 'Counter-Tourism' project through pocketbook, handbook (Smith 2012a & 2012b) and online micro-films made with Siobhán Mckeown (2012), passing on general strategy and specific tactics to tourists and artists alike to create their own self-disruptive visits to heritage sites. It also reappeared in projects like *Signs & Wonders* in 2012, created with Katie Etheridge and Simon Persighetti for Green Close Studios to memori-

alise the Lancashire 'witch trials' of 1612, including the "de-canting" of key sites (a combination of literary denunciation and exorcism) through cut-up texts, peddling numerous copies of a 'mis-guide' openly-disguised as a local history pamphlet and distributing wax limbs in the market for hiding in participants' homes. And in my *Shapes* walk (2011) for Weymouth (UK)'s 'b-side Festival' where audiences and passers-by assisted me in dragging an unexplained bath full of water along the route. After narrating the terrain through the lightly 'quoted' persona of an Edwardian detective (I was dressed in period clothes and sported a bushy silver beard, but I did not impersonate him), after an hour I hinted that I was just as likely to be channelling the landscape through the persona of the detective's quarry—the 'Brides In The Bath' murderer, who had lived with one of his victims along the route—and that the creation with the audience of tableaux along the way were equivalents of criminologist Frances Glessner Lee's miniature "nutshell studies" of murder scenes (including one ['Dark Bathroom'] modelled on the 'Brides In The Bath' killings). This revealed and changed nothing, it was not a dramatic *dénouement*; rather I continued to narrate the terrain, but now the audience read it simultaneously through the eyes of the killer, through their sense of betrayal (by me) *and* through my now doubly traduced persona of the detective.

Despite its relatively brief period of construction and its single performance the structure of *Water Walk* and its multiple feints—unveiling, evasion/exorcism, and spectral return—remain to be utilised as starting points for critical tourisms and guiding performances that not only engage with the 'dark' content of heritage sites, but then dismantle and reflexively-exorcise the entertaining and authoritative voice of that criticism and enact its spectral return in forms as abject as anything it dares to critique.

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