Wapping: the 'Stage' for an Audio Trail

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Abstract

The production of guided walks for tourists is an expanding phenomenon in British cities. In London, for example, there are themed walks relating to literary figures (e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens, Wilde), history (e.g. London's 'villages', Roman London, Victorian London) and fantasy (ghost walks, Jack the Ripper tours), provided by a number of commercial firms. These walks, especially the latter, have not been without their problems/ detractors (guides and tourists attacked, verbally and physically; congestion caused by the number of competing groups; over-large group sizes to increase commercial profits, etc.). Many have been criticised for lack of 'authenticity', for trivialising local problems and sanitising unwholesome conditions, on the one hand, and for glamorising and inventing unpleasant situations, on the other. Pile (2005) records the way in which participants in ghost trails become immersed in the subject, to the extent of (supposedly) witnessing paranormal phenomena.

The project in Wapping, discussed in this paper, is an artistic project and, unlike the commercial ventures referred to above, is a non-profit venture, provided free of charge to anyone. Like the commercial ventures, it aims to immerse the participant walker in the story of a local area; in this case, however, the aim is to develop an appreciation and understanding of an area of London which is unfamiliar to many people, both tourists and Londoners, despite being only a short distance from Tower Bridge and St. Catherine's Dock. It challenges the way in which the walker views their city/ this city, rather than seeking simply to entertain or provide factual information. Crucially, the project seeks to engage local people in the production, testing and evaluation of the 'trail', and also to provide copies of the latter on CD and as an Internet download free of charge (made possible by funding from Arts Council England, and through the collaboration of the local council and community organisations).

Earlier stages of the project comprised an installation and the creation of a walking tour, guided by performance artists, which was offered to groups of tourists in 2003. Subsequent to this, a 45 minute site-specific digital audio walk has been produced. This will guide solo travellers (both tourists and local people) through Wapping with the use of a portable audio player and headphones. Guided by an elderly woman's search for her lost love, the 'story' of the walk includes personal reminiscence, factual history of the area (now substantially redeveloped following war damage) and fictional episodes which illuminate the sense of place. This paper discusses the decision-making process in the formulation of the Wapping audio tour and its on-going progress, in relation to previous literature and examples of other tourist guided walks in cities.

Introduction

A concern that places and heritage sites have become commodified through 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1976; Timothy and Boyd, 2003) runs through much current literature in the fields of tourism and heritage. This paper considers the issue in relation to guided trails, but focuses on one specific example (that of an audio tour devised in Wapping, East London), which has been designed as an artistic project, rather than as a heritage trail. In this project, Wapping becomes the 'stage' upon which a performance is based, with the audio tour challenging the way in which the visitor/ walker views the city, rather than seeking simply to entertain or provide factual information.

Wapping is not an area of London normally subjected to a 'tourist gaze', which seeks 'features of landscape and townscape which separate them [visitors] off from everyday experience' (Urry, 2002, 3), and one aim of the project is to develop an appreciation and understanding of a place which is unfamiliar (perhaps, through its 'ordinariness') to many people, both tourists and Londoners, despite being only a short distance from the well-known sights/ sites of Tower Bridge and St. Catherine's Dock. Eade (2002, 132) notes that '… only the adventurer/ explorer visits Spitalfields' and this is probably even more true of Wapping, despite the re-orientation of the landscape of East London towards a visitor economy (discussed by Shaw et al., 2004).

According to Franklin (2003), Urry's theory of the 'tourist gaze' is a 'simplistic reduction' and more emphasis should instead be placed upon the concept of '… aestheticisation, a process linked to postmodernity in which more and more ordinary objects of the world become mantled in aesthetic beauty …' (Franklin, 2003, 70). He notes that 'Tourists take something other than souvenirs and memories away from tourist sites: in performing the interested, open and fascinated observer of popular history role, and in learning to glean information from guides, dioramas and displays, tourists develop what might be called a generalised receptivity and predisposition to objects of the everyday' (Franklin, 2003, 71). 'The use of performance as a metaphor for tourist practice has become a critical focus of attention in the literature in recent years' Mordue, 2005, 180). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) notes that: 'Much that is familiar from theatre is deployed in some fashion within the tourism industry'. The *Wapping:audio* project uses performers to create dramatic roles, whilst also seeking to engage visitors/ tourists as co-performers in exploring the 'hidden' and contested history of an 'everyday' area of east London.

Urban Trails

The production of guided walks for tourists is an expanding phenomenon in cities, although Timothy and Boyd (2003, 50) assert that: 'For the most part, linear tourist attractions have received considerably less attention than those that are characterised as points or areas' and, where they exist, '… small-scale trails are specifically theme driven, including industrial, cultural and literary heritage, to name a few' (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 52). In London there are themed walks relating to literary figures (e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens, Wilde), history (e.g. London's 'villages', Roman London, Victorian London) and fantasy (ghost walks, Jack the Ripper tours), provided by a

number of commercial firms. Johnson (2004), writing about Dublin, describes how, on Bloomsday (16 June) each year, the re-enactment of 'Ulysses' characters takes place along a route through the city. Tourists use maps and guidebooks which link the book to map and place. He says that: 'The guide is a navigational tool rather than a synopsis of the book' and that: ' … the maps invite the tourists to select the routes for themselves' (Johnson, 2004, 101-102). However, one specific route is marked by 14 bronze pavement plaques, inlaid in 1988. This is reminiscent of the famous Boston Freedom Trail, a walking trail marked by a red footpath (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 52). Timothy and Boyd also consider an example of trail development in Mombasa, Kenya, linked to broadening of the tourism base, away from sun, sand and safari, to include culture, architecture and heritage.

Alexander and McKenzie (1999, Abstract) state that: '… heritage trails … can make visible the social forces that, through influencing public and private decision-making, have shaped and degraded the natural world and built environments, and can celebrate efforts to achieve social and ecological justice. Projects such as heritage trails can contribute to replacing fragmented, dualistic cityscapes with 'landscapes that heal, connect and empower, that make intelligible our relations with each other and with the natural world''. Dove (1997) discusses various uses for urban trails – for example, helping to create a sense of place, linking tourist attractions, exploring heritage, researching place perceptions – and notes that they are used widely in teaching.

Markwell et al. (2004) discuss the development of two heritage walks in Mayfield, a working class suburb of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. They say that trails may be designed around one theme or many, but that they tend to be organised around key objects in the landscape, such as houses, etc. 'These are usually, though not exclusively, those elements that can appeal to the visual sense, and can help tell a story that is mostly structured around a clear, chronological logic' (Markwell et al., 2004, 460). However, the latter may be difficult in local suburban areas, such as Mayfield, where the trail development was seen as part of the re-imaging of a working class/ newly gentrified area. Field work allowed the identification of landscape features of potential value to the trails, and archival, local forum and field data were analysed to identify significant themes. The trails were launched in April 2003, with guided walks using interpretive brochures. The latter were freely distributed and also available for download. Additional commitment from the local Council will provide for signage, seating and public art on the trails.

Urban trails have not been without their problems and detractors. Many have been criticised for lack of 'authenticity', for trivialising local problems and sanitising unwholesome conditions, on the one hand, and for glamorising and inventing unpleasant situations, on the other. Pile (2005) records the way in which participants in ghost trails become immersed in the subject, to the extent of (supposedly) witnessing paranormal phenomena. 'New Orleans thrives on … stories of blood-loss and death. People are eager to hear of the brutalities and sadistic practices of the past' (Pile, 2005, 127). Issues of race, gender and social class may not be adequately addressed by trails. As Markwell et al. (2004, 466-467) point out: 'It is not an easy task to interpret class struggles or inequalities arising out of gender or ethnicity within the confines of an interpretive brochure that is necessarily limited in size, scope and degree of complexity'. Public buildings (the most likely elements of a trail) do not reflect women's history and, in addition, 'Heritage walks and other forms of interpretation tend to focus on the visible legacies of the wealthy and the powerful –

the ‘sites and monuments’ approach – and neglect the contributions of the working class and of structurally induced conflict between social classes’.

Local people have also reacted against urban trail developments. In Spitalfields, East London, for example, where there have been attempts to attract cultural tourists, sharp social divisions and gentrification ensure that: ‘A safe local world of ‘Dickensian’ nostalgia might be provided inside local properties, but out on the streets the adventurous tourists are more vulnerable to local resentments’ (Eade, 2002, 139). Eade discusses the example of a walking tour for American tourists, led by a Jewish professor, coming into confrontation with young Bangladeshi men. ‘Although Bill Fishman wanted to reveal ‘his East End’ to visitors through a highly informed guided tour, his performance was increasingly conditioned and constrained by varying Bangladeshi appropriations of the same space’ (Eade, 2002, 137). Markwell et al. (2004, 460) note that ‘… various groups endow places with a range of meanings and identities for different purposes in the same location. To interpret the layers of meaning overlaid on any place, then, is a complex and challenging task’.

Part of the problem for residents is the congestion caused by the number of competing groups and the encouragement of over-large group sizes in order to increase commercial profits. Talking about ghost, Voodoo and vampire walking tours in New Orleans, Pile notes that: ‘… each street-corner in the French Quarter and garden District may … have a walking tour party of 20 to 50 people listening intently to a story-teller … The walking tours are a striking phenomenon of New Orleans tourism … (Pile, 2005, 124-125). This is also a problem in several parts of London. Audio tours, which are performed individually or in small groups, could help to ease this problem, whilst also helping to ‘people’ otherwise-empty places (such as the streets and spaces of Wapping on weekdays) with visitors who, with their CD or minidisk players, blend into the background unobtrusively.

Markwell et al. (2004, 460) note that: ‘An approach frequently used to help construct a personal sense of place for locals and visitors alike is to create a self-directed interpretive walking tour’, increasingly using audio-tape. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) discusses audio tours as one example of ‘theatrical mediation’ used in heritage production. Timothy and Boyd (2003, 222) note that: ‘Self-guided audio tours are a useful non-visual medium …These tours are effective because they allow visitors to set their own pace, spend time in areas that interest them and spend less time in places that do not’. However, such tours may also promote silence and lack of discussion, isolating visitors from each other (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 228). In a recent issue of the *Observer*, Martin writes of the ‘world’s first city iTour’, a trail entitled ‘Glasgow: Sounds of a Musical Capital’. This is a two hour tour of rock venues, comprising the ‘right mix of trivia, tourism information and new music’ which ‘takes visitors to many little hidden treasures that other guides don’t’ and which ‘can be taken at your own pace’. The tour may be downloaded from internet to iPod (which is also true of the Wapping audio trail).

Authenticity Issues

An immediate concern in the development of an urban trail, as with other visitor attractions, is the degree of authenticity which can be obtained. Linked to this are the questions: what makes something ‘authentic’? and how ‘authentic’ do visitors want

something to be? The issues have been widely discussed in the context of heritage sites and historical representation (see, for example, Shaw and Williams (2004); Timothy and Boyd (2003)). Uzzell (1989, 44) notes that: 'We cannot re-create the past or provide a 'truly authentic atmosphere', since visitors' perceptions of the past will always be influenced by their present-day attitudes and values'. Similarly, Crang (1994, 341) says: '… the past is not an immutable object. Rather, it is endlessly revised from our present positions. History cannot be known save from the always transitional present'. In addition, since it is impossible to portray the whole of history, it is a *selective* past which is re-created, but selectivity tends to be biased in favour of '… those elements that society values … wants to remember and feels proud about (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 237). Markwell et al. (2004, 459) tell us that: '… place-making is as much about forgetting as remembering, and its use as a strategy for re-imaging ensures that some (perhaps many) histories are inevitably overlooked or ignored in favour of those stories that are easy to tell and, indeed, to sell'. It is, of course, the *commodification* of history as heritage which creates the greatest concern amongst researchers and writers in the field. In particular, the concept of 'staged authenticity' is relevant here – a term first employed by MacCannell (1976) to describe the process by which tourists are prevented from seeing the 'back' region (of real, 'authentic' life) by being steered towards a 'front' region of interaction between hosts and guests, where authenticity is 'staged' for commercial advantage. This could be seen as a characteristic of many urban trails, led by commercial tour guides, but is directly challenged by the present project.

What makes something 'authentic'? Does it have to be ' … grounded in and related to solid fact' (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 237)? 'Perhaps it is more important to allow people to 'create' their own authentic experiences … and accept that authenticity is both relative and subjective when reduced to the personal level' (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 255). Crang (1996, 429) comments that: 'So often tourism is equated with commodification and the ruin of authenticity … experiencing a realistic past must be a more reflexive process than is often suggested'. Cohen-Hattab and Kerber (2004, 60) remind us that: 'An obsession with the simple preservation of history, which is always located 'out there' somewhere – which we can periodically access in order to draw upon its authenticity – is arguably of less value than a respectful approach to heritage, which we continually assimilate into ourselves and re-present within a dynamic context'.

How 'authentic' does the tourist want something to be in any case? Crang (1994, 351) refers to the way in which visitors reinterpret displayed heritage in terms of their own life stories or communal memories; 'Their imaginations are a part of the experience as much as anything else' (Crang, 1994, 346). Keith (1995, 302), in writing about the variety of specialised tours (Jack the Ripper tours, Jewish tours, Kray gangster tours, Huguenot tours) in Whitechapel, East London, says that: ' … the street walk on each occasion renders visible particular genres of spatialised knowledges. The tour itself becomes the medium through which the identity of the place is revealed, the knowledge production process replicated through the individuals making the tour'. Perhaps more important than the presentation of strictly historic truth is, as Moscardo (1999, in Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 176-177) asserts, the encouragement of *mindful* visitors, by involving them in making decisions and by telling a good story that makes sense.

Cohen-Hattab and Kerber (2004, 60) go even further, in noting that: 'In some cases

where the inauthentic is particularly effective in masking its own constructedness in the telling of a good story, the tourist may even celebrate and find delight in the convincing quality of the artifice'. A fictional story may be historically inaccurate and yet tell more truth than historical documents, and contribute to an authentic understanding of place and people: 'Treating fiction as a novel yet familiar way of scripting space enables us to read the landscape and confront the nuanced time-space matrices of everyday life in more searching ways' (Johnson, 2004, 105). Cohen-Hattab and Kerber (2004, 59) '…demonstrate how in some cases creative literary depictions have … sharply challenged received tourist notions of … sites derived from other textual media, undercutting simplistic accounts of the geographical and cultural identity of the site to reveal new layers of complexity that help to turn the 'site' back into a 'place''. As will be discussed later, the Wapping audio trail is composed largely of fictional elements but seeks to provide an authentic experience and understanding of place.

Community involvement in local place-making projects

One of the ways in which 'authenticity' (however this is understood) can be encouraged is to involve local communities in the development of place-making projects. Eade (2002, 129-130), writing about tourism developments in East London, notes that: 'It is in these peripheral localities that a clearer contrast can be made between the official and professional attempts to interpret urban space for tourists, on the one hand, and the alternative knowledges of residents on the other. Here we can more easily examine people's imagined worlds in relation to the changing social and economic character of their localities: the scapes of people's imaginations and the physical urban landscapes which surround them'. Consultation with local residents is discussed by Markwell et al., in relation to their development of heritage trails in Mayfield (Newcastle, N.S.W.); residents were encouraged ' … to participate in the development of interpretive themes and stories by sharing their recollections with the research team, and to help the researchers focus on the stories and themes that the local residents who attended considered to be worthy of interpretation' (Markwell et al. (2004, 463).

Timothy and Boyd (2003, 181) stress that: 'It is important to understand that local residents are a part of the tourism product; they should be treated with respect, and their concerns and ideas have to be addressed'. Hopefully, there will then be greater tolerance shown to visitors. 'Residents need to be given an opportunity to decide what should be interpreted and how it should be interpreted. This type of empowerment can result in increased community pride and modification of behaviour towards local physical and sociocultural environments' (Timothy and Boyd, 2003, 205). As Westerhausen (2003, 82) states: 'What is required is ongoing co-operation between the community and the tourism industry in order to maximize the benefits and to minimize impacts of tourism'. An example of such co-operation is cited by Aitchison et al.; in Clerkenwell (East London), a walking tour devised by a local history society was opened in 1998 by the Culture Secretary. This is called the Clerkenwell Trail and is 3km long, marked by plaques and banners. 'The tone of the Trail is discreet and unobtrusive, in sympathy with the medieval pattern of winding streets and alleys, as well as accommodating views expressed by local residents and businesses' (Aitchison et al., 2000, 157).

The *Wapping: audio* project creators arranged meetings with various community groups in Wapping, to tell them about the project, and listen to their opinions on the place where they live. They met the Wapping Pensioners Group, a small group of elderly white British women, who shared stories about their experiences of growing up and living in Wapping, and how much the place has changed. Information about physical features of the area that are no longer there (a hospital, schools, working lifting bridges, docks), and also how the 'feel' of the place has changed, was also given. Women from the Wapping Bangladeshi Association were also consulted. They lived in social housing and had been placed here by the Council, and so had not specifically chosen to live in Wapping. They knew little about the history of the area, but very much liked living there, and appreciated the large number of playgrounds and parks in the area. The Wapping Trust also provided historical photos of the area.

Performance

'The term "performance" has become extremely popular in recent years in a wide range of activities in the arts, in literature, and in the social sciences. As its popularity and usage has grown, so has a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyze and understand just what sort of human activity it is' (Carlson, 1996, 1). Traditionally, 'performance' could be described as a '...loose cluster of theatrical practices, relations, and traditions' (Parker and Sedgwick, 1995, 1). Performers in the theatre '… use their everyday expressive resources - voice, gesture, movement and so on - to construct a fictional participant in the narrative, a character, which will function as the notional author of the actor's words and actions' (Counsell, 1996, 3).

'Performance' implies the presence of an audience (Carlson, 1996, 5-6; Goodman, 1996, 30) but there is no necessity for this audience to be entirely passive. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, 40), quoting Turner (1982), point out that '...performance involves a relationship between performer and audience in which a liminal space, however slight, is opened up. The performer-audience interaction occurs within, or represents, critical areas in which a society is self-reflexive; it provides a kind of window, 'a limited area of transparency', through which an examination of socially and culturally sensitive issues is possible'. Williams (2000), however, asserts that we live in a 'dramatized society'. As Connor (1996, 109) suggests, '...ours is a culture that is so saturated with and fascinated by techniques of representation and reproduction, that it has become difficult for us to be sure where action ends and performance begins. Ours is a world, it is commonly said, of widespread and pervasive simulation, in which the traditional means of separating off instances of performance from instances of the real seem to be compromised, if not wholly superseded'. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, 72-73) state that: 'So deeply infused into everyday life is performance that we are unaware of it in ourselves or in others. Life is a constant performance; we are audience and performer at the same time ...' The present project (which involves dramatic story-telling by performers) seeks to engage visitors, both as audience and performers.

Although dramatic works have traditionally been presented in theatres, there is no necessity for performance to take place in a specialised and segregated 'performance space'; Kershaw (1999, 19), for example, views 'performance beyond theatre' as *the* radical force of performance. The principle of site-specific performance is now well-

established and many examples could be cited: one interesting recent performance, discussed in the *Guardian*, involved the use of a coach and an old, disused hotel in Brighton (Mahoney, 2005). In the present instance, the 'site' specifically employed is the streets, open spaces, and physical structures of Wapping in East London.

The *Wapping: audio* Project

Creation of the project and choice of site

The project began whilst the three creators (Ball, Day and Livergant) were studying together on the MA in Advanced Theatre Practice at Central School of Speech and Drama (2002-2003). Initially a research project, the project has since gone through several stages, with outcomes at each stage. Wapping in East London was initially chosen almost at random, but the idea was pursued because of a desire to add a new myth to the many conflicting mythologies and histories of the area. The strangeness of the place was of considerable appeal; Wapping is within walking distance of the City of London, but is eerily quiet, almost like a film set. Its many histories have been (too) successfully buried, so that even genuine historical architecture and features appear faked. Aitchison et al. (2000, 156), discussing another study in East London, note that 'few aspects of the area's eventful past are obvious from the buildings or streetscape'.

There has been private regeneration and deliberate gentrification in Wapping, encouraged by policies of the London Docklands Development Corporation (established 1981), although some redevelopment preceded this; St. Katherine's Dock and the warehouse conversions there began in the 1970s, while Oliver's Wharf (a former tea and peanut warehouse) on Wapping High Street was converted in 1972. Land values in the area increased by ten times between 1983 and 1986. 'The principal motor for this change has not, for the most part, been the displacement of existing residents, but rather the conversion to residential use of former commercial properties (especially warehouses) and the construction for sale of new flats and houses' (Hall and Ogden, 1992, 153). The population of Wapping grew by 50% between 1981 and 1991 and there was a marked increase in the number of young adults and small, high-income households, together with a growth in owner-occupation. The huge rise in house prices has led to demographic and economic polarisation between the new residents and the council tenants (there are still major local authority estates in Wapping) (Hall and Ogden, 1992). There are thus three very different resident communities in Wapping, and they exist in almost total isolation from each other: 'old Wapping' – mainly white British working class, whose families have often lived in the area for generations; 'immigrants' – mainly from Bangladesh and living in social housing; 'city workers' – white collar professionals who work in Wapping or the City of London. The audio tour route was planned to take the walker through areas that are used by all three of these communities: the riverside; parks and canals; social housing; executive apartments; churches and community centres.

Initially, the project creators undertook tasks, like walking solo through the area for 40 minutes and recording what was experienced, and then creating stories out of this material. An installation was mounted, including photography and audio material, which charted the work so far. A large-scale site specific guided walk through the area was then created, involving small groups of tourists being guided along a route

by a series of four performer guides (June 2003). 50 performers peopled the area and created performances which were only subtly more unusual than everyday actions, designed to be caught in passing by the tourists.

The current phase of the project began in 2004; a ten minute sample version of the audio tour was made, with an accompanying video, in order to illustrate the potential of the work. In 2005, Arts Council England (London Office, Visual Arts Department) funding was applied for and gained, to support the making of the *Wapping: audio* project financially. Funding needs were not entirely met by this grant, and the project creators have also relied heavily on support in kind, secured through contacts. The development team consists of the three co-creators, a sound designer (Catherine Seymour who works as a sound engineer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's London studios), and a website designer (Nick Wood). CBC kindly permitted the use of their radio studio to record the voice performers, and the audio track was put together at their studios.

Telling the story

A great deal of research was undertaken during the creation of the tour, from books and the internet, and from meeting and interviewing residents of Wapping (hearing their stories and opinions) and local historians. Inspiration was thus taken from different histories, both written and personal, but the latter were used to create an alternative reality; the project creators' own history or myth of Wapping. The information gathered, therefore, greatly informed the understanding of the area, and the choices made, but did not enslave the creators. The narrative of the audio trail is not set in a specific time period, but instead time is used more fluidly, with the narrator's experience spanning time periods, and events happening out of chronological order.

There was some discussion about using 'real' people's voices to narrate the walk, and to tell their own personal stories for themselves, but it was decided instead to use performers for the voice work. This was for two main reasons: firstly, their ability to take on the role, conveying emotion, and having an understanding of pace and tone; and secondly, to give the creators more freedom in the stories that were told and how they were told. Just as there was a desire not to be restricted by telling only the 'true' history of the area, there was an equal desire not to arrange a walk around people's reminiscences recounted in full by themselves. The project creators did not want the responsibility of ensuring that people's stories were conveyed faithfully and in the manner in which they were originally told. What was wanted was the freedom to pick bits from the stories and use them in other contexts, in order to integrate the material into one coherent story told by one narrator.

Key points of interest from which the narrative was created and the route determined were as follows:

Sailors, rowdy pubs, wappers (bloated dead bodies, floating in the Thames)
Love affair, lost love, dancing, lovers leaving to serve their country
Discovery of the new world and founding of the empire, Frobisher etc
Pirates – pirate ships by Tobacco Dock, hangings by the river
Strikes and Riots – dock workers and print workers
Diseases – the plague, and diseases brought in on the ships
Exoticism – imported products (tea, tobacco etc), foreigners

World War Two – destruction of the docks by bombs
1980s – Construction, conversion and gentrification
Contemporary Wapping

An elderly woman acts as the narrator of the story; the story told is mostly presented as her story. As a younger woman she falls in love with a foreign sailor (providing hints of exoticism) and the relationship progresses through a series of snatched meetings in alleyways and at secret dances (the pre-WWII time period is evoked here). The couple are forced to part; he has to leave on his ship (there is the suggestion of going to fight in a war – WWII or another war - or to found the empire or discover the new world). The narrator's mother is reputed to have been a pirate, and was hung for her crimes by the river. It is her ship (the pirate ship, the Three Sisters, outside the Tobacco Dock shopping development) that we discover in dry dock at the end of the walk.

Although the narrator of the tour appears to be from the 'old Wapping' group, concerted efforts were made to ensure that a broad viewpoint is offered. Since the tour recreates histories of the area (albeit fictional), there was often a tendency to lapse into a 'those were the days' attitude, a tendency which is only too familiar in heritage re-creations as well. Crang (1994, 348-349) discusses the type of 'heritage journey' taken by local history groups, for example, who tend to think of the past in terms of loss: 'It is a past that has been destroyed by the abstract forces of modernity – by capital flows, the state, and changes in society. And it is mobilised as part of a struggle to preserve communities from these external forces; to write the history of areas so they will never again be a blank slate for redevelopment'. The testimonies from members of the Bangladeshi community, in particular, helped the project creators to maintain a positive attitude towards contemporary Wapping; this community appreciated the peace and quiet, the abundance of parks and playgrounds, and the 'ornamental canals' which provide a secluded place to take a walk.

Determining the route

The first stage in the determination of the route involved identifying sites to be included in the audio tour. Maps of the area were drawn from memory, and sites of interest marked on them. From these, areas of Wapping that were not of particular interest to any of the creators were eliminated, gradually chipping away at the terrain that would be covered. The vital importance of sites on the periphery of the area was questioned. For example, it would have been really interesting for the walker to see the noose, which hangs by the river at the end of a narrow alley next to the Prospect of Whitby pub, but this site was much further East than other marked sites. The walk to this site was carefully timed and it was found to be too long, and the route not sufficiently interesting, to justify seeing the noose. The decision was therefore made to exclude the site from the route, but to keep the idea of a hanging, by making a reference to it at some point during the tour.

There were many practical considerations that had to be taken into account when choosing the route of the walk. For example, it was initially planned that the tour could be taken at any time of the day or night. However, in order to keep the walk short enough to be comfortable, and to take as interesting a route as possible within the smaller area of Wapping that had already been selected, it was necessary to walk through a park that is locked at sunset. This means that the audio tour can now be

taken in daytime hours only.

Early on in the creation process, the project leaders became aware that they would need to find the right balance between the route, the sites, the story, and the sound score. They realised that the walker would experience different atmospheres and emotions at different points in the walk. These could be created by the specific place, but also by what was added to it with story and sound. For example, after walking up the long ramp and emerging on to the (old) dock side at Spirit Quay, with a view of Tower Bridge in the distance, the walker experienced a feeling of exhilaration, of the world opening out, of freedom; this emotion being generated by the feeling of space. At some points in the walk the creators chose to reinforce this type of emotion with sound and narrative, and at others they chose to play against it. They found that the walker had more 'head space' to listen to the narrative when the space they were passing through was less interesting architecturally.

The role of the walker, and the relationship between the walker and the guide

Initially, the creators wanted to make the walker complicit in the narrative. Because the tour can only take place if the walker is there doing it, the idea was to suggest that the narrator guide has a task to fulfil and the presence of the walker is the necessary link in the chain – they have to be there, to enable the search to take place. This was, however, difficult to realise in practice. Attempts to concretise the relationship between the guide and the walker, through the imposition of an actual task to be carried out in the present moment, were found to be unsatisfying as a driving force for the tour. Such attempts tended to oversimplify things, were too shallow, and meant that the scope of the material covered in the tour had to be greatly reduced. The creators decided that a certain amount of ambiguity would, instead, be useful, allowing walkers to fill in the gaps in their own way. The necessity of the walker would be implied, but not overstated.

The guide is seeking to tell her story to as many people as possible, and is grateful to the walker for listening; each walker provides another opportunity. The walker is present while short scenes are created around her/him with sound, including several featuring the guide and her young male lover, the sailor. These scenes appear to recreate past events, or they could be figments of the guide's imagination. The walker is both spectator and main character in these scenes. (S)he is aware that the young lover is talking to the guide character, but since no answer is heard from the guide, (s) he realises that he is also talking to her/him. This places the walker in the role of the guide as a younger woman. This duality of roles may be more satisfactory for walkers who would choose to be with a male partner, as it may be easier for them to imagine that the young male lover character is talking to them.

The instructional element of the audio tour affects how the walker moves in the space. In this way, the tour creates a performer out of the walker. The walker may take routes they would not normally choose, walk at a different pace, look at things in different ways, and pay attention to things they would not usually have noticed. The tour is also a performance created *for* the walker. As with traditional theatre, the walker must use her/his imagination to fill in the pictures. There is a theatre or film set laid out in front of her/him; in this instance it is the real streets of Wapping, rather than a specially constructed set on a stage.

The decision-making process

This can best be described as a slow evolution. Clear-cut decisions were difficult to take, as each element of the tour was so closely linked to the rest. Deciding the route relied on knowing more about the story that was going to be told. What was present in the story relied on knowing which sites the tour would visit and pass by, or through. The decision-making process progressed by taking small steps; making a minor decision about the story allowed the creators to rule out or count in a particular site, for example. The options were slowly narrowed down, mainly by making a note when at least two out of three had identified the same points, and carrying these points forward.

In outline, the process took the following form:

Stories remembered from earlier versions of the project were retold, and maps of the area drawn from memory
Sites of interest were identified
Characters, dramatic episodes, and sounds/soundscapes were discussed
The route was decided, after testing several possible options.
Fragments of narrative were written.
The walk was timed.
Directions for the walker were written and tested.
A first draft of the script was written by one collaborator, and then heavily edited and reworked by the others in turn.
This was recorded in a rough version and tested, and then reworked further, to improve clarity of directions, and rearrange placement of narrative along the route.
The script was then compiled.
The voice work was recorded.
Sounds were collected, some captured on location, and some sourced from a sound library.
The sound score was written out as a paper draft.
The first draft of the audio tour was put together, integrating the recorded voices and the sounds. This was then tested by the creators, and some volunteers who offered critical feedback.
All feedback was discussed and integrated into the next draft of the audio tour, which included a richer soundscape, additional narrative, and more accurate timings. This was tested again, by the creators and volunteers
The final version of then audio tour was put together, with minor adjustments made as a result of feedback from the testers
The audio tour was uploaded on to the website, and pressed on to 500 CDs, ready for public distribution

Dissemination and Evaluation

The audio tour is being disseminated in two different ways. 1. It is available to download from a website (www.wappingaudio.org) on to CD or Minidisk to play on an audio player, or straight on to an iPod or MP3 player. 2. CDs are available from distribution points at venues in East London (including on loan from all Tower Hamlets Libraries).

The project was launched on Wednesday 13th July 2005 and will run for a two year period. During this time, the number of people visiting the website, and the number of CDs being taken and borrowed from the distribution points, will be monitored. This will suggest how widely the project is being used. The *Wapping:audio* website includes a Forum page, where walkers are encouraged to post their responses to the experience, and it is hoped that feedback will be obtained from the audience in this way.

The audio trail was also evaluated by the fourth member of the writing team (Tivers), who was not involved in the development of the project. This evaluation consisted of a number of stages; in the first place, she took part in one of the guided walks in 2003, secondly, she followed a rough draft of the audio tour two weeks before the launch, and thirdly, she attended the launch and undertook the completed tour. At each stage, comments and suggestions were fed back to the project team.

Conclusion

Selby (2004, 50) states that: 'Urban tourism … attracts considerable criticism for its decontextualisation of culture and history, and its use for economic and social ends…' The *Wapping: audio* project seeks rather to contextualise culture and history, and to provide completely free access to a site-specific performance, for visitors of all types - local residents, other Londoners and tourists. Markwell et al. (2004, 458) consider that: 'The benefits of place-making and place-marking projects can go beyond the development of community pride in a particular area, raising awareness of almost forgotten histories, encouraging a meaningful sense of place, and marking localities as different in the face of homogenising trends'. The present project has been seen to have these benefits. There is also the potential to extend the approach of the project, to create a series of walks in regenerated urban industrial areas of other cities in the UK and around the world, and similar audio tours are being developed by the project team in Birmingham, Athens and Toronto.

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