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Tracing memories: the guided trail as an aid to cultural memory in the artworks by Janet Cardiff

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CHAPTER 8.

TRACING MEMORIES. THE GUIDED TRAIL AS AN AID TO CULTURAL MEMORY IN ARTWORKS BY JANET CARDIFF

Laura M.F. Bertens

Guided trails can play an important role in the construction and maintenance of shared, cultural memory and, as such, they are part of a vast and ever-growing movement heritage. Leading their users along traces of historical events and landmarks that preserve memories, these trails present walkers with narratives that unfold as they are moving and following signposts.¹ Most historical paths are inherently tied to communal memories and the ability of trails to communicate stories and memories can be increased by the use of audio guides, which add information and meaning to the encountered surroundings.

As audio guides have become more common over the last decades, we have grown accustomed to navigating cultural trails with the help of disembodied voices, speaking to us through headphones and giving us directions and historical context. Nowadays, most museums, heritage sites and cities provide audio tours, sending their users on walks past memorable objects and locations. The ubiquity of smartphones and the continuous access to internet and GPS location services have made it possible for audio guides to be looked up and used practically everywhere.² Initially belonging to the domain of the museum space, the audio guide has become a varied and flexible medium, providing narration for walking trails all over the world.³

Although the medium belongs first and foremost to the realm of tourism, its popularity has resulted in experimental applications for scholarly and artistic purposes. Examples of the former include Michael Gallagher's *audio drifts* and Toby Butler's *memoriescapes*, both of which illustrate the use of audio walks in the field of

1 See for instance the 'trailsapes' discussed by Fagence, 'A Heritage "Trailscape"'.

2 Butler, 'Memoriescape', pp. 1–2; Dickinson et al., 'Tourism and the Smartphone App', pp. 84–87; Lee, 'A Review of Audio Guides', pp. 705–06; Marshall, 'Audio-based Narratives for the Trenches of World War I', pp. 28–29.

3 See also Morosini, this volume.

cultural geography.⁴ Instances of artistic use are numerous, dating back over half a century, and include Max Neuhaus' sound work *LISTEN* (1966), a sonic journey led by the artist; the artwork *Linked* by Graeme Miller (2003), which provides an artistic perspective on urban innovation; and Christina Kubisch's *Electrical walks* (2004–2017), in which electromagnetic fields are made audible.⁵ At present, the audio and video walks created by Janet Cardiff, in collaboration with her partner George Bures Miller, are among the most well-known artistic applications of the medium.⁶ Since the 1990s, the couple has been creating site-specific artworks for locations all over the world. The guided walks resemble audio guides but take the format beyond its traditional form and purpose. In their relationship to the construction and preservation of cultural memory, as well as their intentional creation and repetition of trails, the walks become part of a movement heritage that allows the act of walking to attach meaning to the walkers' surroundings.⁷

Cardiff's artworks require active participation and can only be fully experienced by performing them.⁸ Provided with headphones and an audio device (in the older works a cd-player, in the more recent ones an mp3-player or iPod), the participant sets out on a carefully choreographed, individual walk guided by the voice of the artist. While some of these works are designed for the enclosed space of a museum (e.g., *Ittingen Walk*, 2002), many take place in public urban environments, such as Central Park in New York or Edinburgh's Old Town. The participant makes her way through the mundane, everyday life of these spaces, partially aware of her surroundings and partially submerged in the audio of the artwork. In recent years, the artist has also started to create video walks, in which the audio track is combined with a video recording played on an iPod. The participant sees the walk through the eyes of the artist and is

4 Gallagher, 'Sounding Ruins'; Butler and Miller, 'Linked: A Landmark in Sound'; Butler, 'Memoryscape'. The use of walking methods in geography is discussed in Pink et al., 'Walking Across Disciplines'; Revill, 'El tren fantasma'.

5 These and other artistic uses of sound in general and the audio guide in particular are discussed in Butler and Miller, 'Linked: A Landmark in Sound'; Butler, 'Memoryscape', pp. 3–5; Fischer, 'Speeches of Display'; Labelle, *Background Noise*, pp. 119–216.

6 Although they often work together, Janet Cardiff is the main artist in most projects and on their official website she is listed as the only artist for several of the walks. Of the artworks discussed in this essay, *Her long black hair* and *The missing voice: case study B* are works by Cardiff and the *Alter Bahnhof* video walk is a collaboration between Cardiff and Bures Miller. In all works the main voice is Cardiff's; for the sake of simplicity, the essay will therefore refer to Cardiff as the artist.

7 The importance of guided walks in the process of assigning meaning to our surroundings is also discussed in the chapter by Petra Lilja in this volume.

8 It is of course possible to play audio and video of the works in locations other than those intended (from home, for instance) and this can certainly create a powerful experience, albeit a very different one from the experience *in situ*. In this article, the focus of the analysis will be on the performance of the walks in their intended locations.

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invited to align the image on the screen with her surroundings.

Both the audio and the video walks are centred around the voice of the artist, who provides instructions on the route to take, while at the same time drawing the participant into a complex narrative that weaves together references to encountered landmarks in the built environment, cultural memory connected to the site, personal memories of the artist (genuine or invented) and elements of fictional stories. The paths traced by these artworks are followed by thousands of participants over periods of decades (*The missing voice: case study B*, discussed in this chapter, has existed for over twenty years), becoming cultural trails in their own right and forming part of the movement heritage of their surroundings.

The artist's voice, heard through headphones, is accompanied by a range of audio fragments, mostly recorded *in situ* and with the use of binaural recording technology; during recording, a dummy head, fitted with microphones on its ears, is used to capture sounds coming from all directions.⁹ When listening to the final audio track, the participant is thus surrounded by a three-dimensional soundscape. The voice of the artist seems to speak inside one's head and the additional sound fragments blend in with reality so seamlessly, that it is only natural to occasionally take off the headphones to check whether the footsteps, birds and street noises are real or part of the artwork.

The combination of binaural audio, the hypnotic voice of the artist and the intricate layering of stories results in an immersive and highly personal experience. Although it is common for traditional audio guides to provide directions on a guided trail, the instructions in these works are more intimate. In *Her long black hair* (2004) the artist instructs us: 'Try to walk to the sound of my footsteps so we can stay together.'¹⁰ Similar instructions are given in other artworks and throughout the walks we are told to wait for her as we cross streets, to note people and objects she points out and to join her in carrying out small experiments. We are in the presence of the artist, experiencing her thoughts, fears and memories.

At the centre of each work is the act of walking itself, following a trail set out by the artist. The importance of walking is emphasised in the works, for instance in *Her long black hair*, which takes place in Central Park, New York. While making our way through the park, the artist tells us:

Walking is very calming, one step after another, one foot moving in the future and one in the past. Do you ever think about that? It's like our bodies are caught in the middle. The hard part is staying in the present, really being here, really feeling alive.¹¹

9 Cardiff and Bures Miller, *Something Strange this Way*, p. 91.

10 Track 1, *Her long black hair* (2004).

11 Track 1, *Her long black hair* (2004).

An interest in the relationship between past and present is a frequent occurrence in Cardiff's artworks and seems to be concerned more with memory than with history. The works are not intended to convey historical information about the trails. Instead, they involve the participant in the emotional layers of meaning that have become attached to these locations. By using personal memories and making frequent allusions to the process of remembering and commemorating, the works make participants aware of the mnemonic significance of their surroundings and of the act of walking through them. As such they form part of, and add to the growing awareness of, movement heritage.

The distinction between memory and history is far from exact and is best understood as a difference of perspective. In Oren Baruch Stier's words, 'history is concerned with events in the past and their meaning *for* the present, while memory involves the impact of the events of the past and their meaning *in* the present'.¹² As such, cultural memory is not simply passed on as passive and immutable information, but is continuously produced by those individuals in the present for whom the past holds relevance; it is a performative construction.¹³ Art can both actively add to this construction and help us reflect on its process. The walks by Janet Cardiff do both.¹⁴

In this essay, I will look at two of Cardiff's artworks to show that the artistic use of audio- or video-guided walks can be a powerful tool in the communication and production of site-specific cultural memory.¹⁵ The audio walk *The missing voice: case study B* (1999) takes its participants through the Whitechapel neighbourhood in London. The second case study, the *Alter Bahnhof-video walk* (2012), leads one through the train station in Kassel, Germany. While the two artworks differ in location, historical context and use of audio and video, they both explore the close relationship between the act of walking and the cultural memories of the traversed (urban) landscape. In the train station in Kassel, the artist tells us: 'It's hard for me to be in the present sometimes.' Performing Cardiff's walks, the participant experiences this same sensation of becoming caught in a confusing network of memories, connected to the trail.

By comparing the characteristics of the two walks to those of the traditional audio guide, idiosyncratic aspects of the artworks come to light. The analysis helps us understand why Cardiff's artistic strategy is a such powerful tool in the

12 Stier, *Committed to Memory*, p. 2, original emphasis.

13 Erll and Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, pp. 1–2.

14 Well-known examples of this dual nature can, for instance, be found in artworks by Christian Boltanski and Gerhard Richter.

15 On the importance of trails, with or without the aid of audio guides, for the construction and preservation of cultural memory, see also the chapter by Maria Piekarska.

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communication of site-specific cultural memories. After introducing the two artworks in the next section, the following three characteristics of the artworks will be discussed: the refusal to create coherent narratives, the deliberately confusing nature of the artworks, and their performativity.

The footsteps of ghosts

The older of the two artworks, *The missing voice: case study B*, is performed in the Whitechapel district of London.¹⁶ This area is well-known for the gruesome murders committed here in 1888 by the Whitechapel murderer, Jack the Ripper. Fascination with the unsolved crimes endures, as evidenced by the numerous books on the subject, the *Ripperologist Magazine*, boardgames and TV series like *Ripper Street*. From the very start, the site has been a tourist attraction; as early as 1888, unofficial tours visited the area in search of (the myth of) Jack the Ripper. And organised tours were already held by the Crimes Club (of which Arthur Conan Doyle was a member) at the start of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Nowadays, commercial tourism companies take visitors on walks through the area and, in addition to these in-person tours by guides, audio guides can be downloaded which allow visitors to explore the area of the crimes on their own.¹⁸ While the historical events have left no visible traces in the neighbourhood, the memories of the deaths are thus still strongly present and continue to attract tourists.

Cardiff's audio walk leads its listeners through the very streets in which the horrors took place but, like the neighbourhood itself, the artwork contains no direct references to these events. No mention is made of the historical importance of the area, and it is only through the work's focus on murder, disguise and detective investigation that Jack the Ripper is brought to mind. Reviews of the audio walk often mention the connection between the neighbourhood and the murders, but there is no reason to suspect that the artist intended an

16 The complete artwork (consisting of three audio tracks) can be found on the website of Artangel: www.artangel.org.uk/project/the-missing-voice-case-study-b. No description can truly do justice to the work and I recommend listening to (part of) it, to get a sense of the soundscape and the atmosphere. When listening, it is important to use headphones to be able to appreciate the effect of the binaural recording.

17 Blum, 'Murder, Myth, and Melodrama', pp. 242–44.

18 Blum ('Murder, Myth, and Melodrama', pp. 247–53) describes three of the most well-known tours with guides, by the companies London Walks (www.walks.com/our-walks/jack-the-ripper-walking-tour), Discovery Tours & Events (www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com) and Secret Chamber Tours (www.rippervision.com). Two examples of audio guides which can be downloaded are the tours by Guidigo (www.guidigo.com/Web/The-bloody-steps-of-Jack-the-Ripper/LMvHuGxYQnY/Stop/1/St.Jame-s-Passage) and by iAudioguide and BlueBrolly (www.iaudioguide.com/jack-ripper-london-audio-guide).

explicit connection.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the audio walk addresses the sense of danger one might feel at night in an urban environment, and the famous Victorian murders form an undeniable part of the history of this present-day experience. Given the artwork's location and the lingering memory of the murders, it makes sense to consider the walk in the context of these historical events and the anxiety they caused.

The walk starts in the crime section of the former Whitechapel Library, currently the Whitechapel Gallery, where the voice of the artist asks us to pick up a crime thriller by Reginald Hill. After reading a few sentences from it, she tells us to put it back and follow her through the library. Upon finding a note in another book saying 'Someone is following you', the artist leads us out of the library and into the street. In between instructions on the route to take and remarks about people and things she encounters on her walk, we hear fragments from different narratives. A man, seemingly a detective, is on the trail of a woman with red hair who appears, herself, to be investigating something. Early on in the walk, the artist tells us: 'I started these recordings as a way to remember, to make life seem more real. I can't explain it. But then the voice became someone else, a separate person hovering in front of me like a ghost.' Is it this second person who is being trailed by the detective? The plot is purposefully ambiguous and the listener remains unable to untangle the different threads.

Throughout the walk, there are references to crime, investigation and surveillance. Passing newsstands, the artist reads out headlines related to an ongoing murder case – from 'Killer waited an hour' and 'Woman's body found in Thames' to 'Dead woman identified'.²⁰ Both the artist and the detective (and therefore the listener too) seem to be following the red-haired woman, whose picture was found by the artist near a photo booth and who may or may not be the victim from the news reports. References to crime fiction, the sensation of being followed and even attacked and the use of played-back voice recordings – crackling and distant – lend the artwork a mysterious air.²¹ The arts organisation Artangel, which commissioned the audio walk, describes it as '[p]

19 A link is seen by, for instance, Boxer, 'An Artist Who Travels with You'; Gorman, 'Wandering and Wondering', p. 83; Preece, 'Janet Cardiff at Whitechapel Library'. Whyte ("Lost in the Memory Palace") goes so far as to assert that the artist is 'mapping the famous murderer's ancient paths.'

20 Track 1, *The missing voice* (1999).

21 The atmosphere and plot elements strongly reminded me of Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), another work in which the act of tracing paths through the city plays a central role; Pinder ('Ghostly Footsteps', p. 6) notes the same.

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art urban guide, part detective fiction, part film noir'.²² It is included in their series *Inner City*, intended to 'encourage writers and artists to excavate a range of urban places and contemplate the changing nature of city environments and the counterpoint between narrative and place; between language and location'.²³

The second case study can be said to function in a similar way. Set in the train station in Kassel, it revolves around the deportation of Jewish citizens from this city to the camps. Their journey started at platform 13 of the train station and is commemorated in the building with a monument by Horst Hoheisel. While the first work was an audio walk and provided its participants with an audio track to follow, this one makes use of both audio and video, inviting the visitor to use an iPod and headphones in order to follow the artist's recording through the train station. Sitting on a bench outside the small office in which the iPods are provided, we are told by the artist to align the image on our screens with our surroundings and to follow her (see Figure 1).²⁴ She takes us through the main hall, past the monument, down to platform 13. Instructions and directions are woven together with personal recollections and fragments of collective memory and history: the artist talks about a friend's grandfather who survived deportation to Auschwitz and she recounts dreams and memories, both recent (from the day before) and older, vaguer ones. Much of the work is devoted to reflecting upon the notion of memory and the ways in which we experience it, both collectively and personally.

As in the last case study, the location of the walk bears few traces of its history. Rebuilt after the war, the only reminder in this modern building of the horrific events of 1941 is the monument.²⁵ As a functioning train station, the building exists first and foremost in the present moment; the layers of history are not readily discernible and most travellers are unlikely to dwell upon them. And just as the audio walk through Whitechapel never mentions Jack the Ripper, the video walk refers to the Holocaust in mostly indirect ways. Throughout the 26 minutes of the walk, there are only three explicit references to the event – a

22 Artangel, www.artangel.org.uk/inner-city/, section *The missing voice (Case Study B)*.

23 Artangel, www.artangel.org.uk/inner-city/, section *Inner City*.

24 A six-minute excerpt of the artwork can be seen on the Youtube channel of the artists: www.youtube.com/channel/UC4u0V-G5KTeWF5hnubp-lrA (accessed 29 November 2021). The video gives a good impression of what it is like to walk through the train station holding the iPod.

25 A complete account of the deportation from Kassel is provided on the website of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center: deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=9442969 (accessed 29 November 2021). Tellingly, the only book about the history of the train station, Klee's *Hauptbahnhof Kassel*, describes only the bunkers built under the train station and square (discussed in purely positive terms as having saved many lives) and the bombing of the site in 1943; no mention is made of the role of the station in the deportation.



Figure 1.

'Alter Bahnhof Video Walk' (2012), by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. On screen we see several people simultaneously and unexpectedly dropping their suitcases, a direct reference to an earlier remark by the artist: 'Memories are like a different form of travel. It's like filling a suitcase that we pull behind us and we open and close when we need to.' Photograph by Laura Bertens; original artwork © Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, courtesy of the artists and Luhring Augustine, New York; *re-use not permitted*.

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description of the monument, an explanation of the significance of platform 13 and a story about an Auschwitz survivor. Nonetheless, the participant is constantly aware of this theme and all other stories, memories and observations are understood in light of this traumatic history. References made by the artist, to remembrance and to the suffering memories can cause, all point to the problem of commemorating an atrocity so gruesome that no representation can ever be emotionally truthful and complete.

As we wander through these sites, we are following in the footsteps of the ghosts of those who have contributed to the locations' identities: the murder victims (as well as the murderer) in Whitechapel and the Jewish deportees in Kassel. The imprint of their lives on these local cultural memories is invisible, intangible and faint, but Cardiff's walks allow participants to become temporarily aware of it. The next three sections will explore the peculiarities of the works that contribute to this effect, beginning with the persistent absence of a conventional, linear narrative.

An absence of narrative

The two artworks are not concerned with historical information – in fact, we learn very little about the sites and their history – but rather with the ways in which historical events have shaped, however slightly, our current experience of these sites. The Victorian murders have added to a collective sense of danger in big metropolises that is still with us today, especially for women walking alone late at night. As Judith Walkowitz asserts: 'the Ripper episode ... established a common vocabulary and iconography for the forms of male violence that permeated the whole society'.²⁶ And in his analysis of theatrical histories of Jack the Ripper, Justin Blum explores how plays have helped create and consolidate a cultural myth around the murderer.²⁷ Modern-day references to the crimes – in books, films, boardgames etc. – further their relevance to the present moment. The memory of the horror lingers, although often based on a distorted image of the historical facts.

Likewise, in Kassel's train station we experience – always faintly and below the surface – the echoes of the meticulous bureaucracy and efficiency of deportation, which has tainted train stations, in Germany in particular. When De Certeau writes that '[t]here is something at once incarcerational and navigational about railroad travel',²⁸ I cannot help but think of the importance of

26 Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 220.

27 Blum, 'Murder, Myth, and Melodrama'.

28 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 113.

railways during the Holocaust. As categories, both the city and the train station have seen their identities affected by these histories. Like palimpsests, these public places are suffused with layers of collective memories which shape our present-day experiences of them. As such, the history of each site is – in Stier’s words – meaningful *in* the present, not just *for* the present. It is this emotional significance of the locations that Cardiff’s walks bring to the fore, shifting our attention away from the facts of history to the experience of memory. While her guided walks may resemble traditional tours, the effect is markedly different.

Heritage audio guides usually provide clear and factual information connected to discrete points of interest encountered on a walk. The linear progression of the trail is matched by an unfolding, linear narrative, which gives the trail purpose and coherence. This is true for most Jack the Ripper tours, which try to match the series of locations to the chronology of events. In constructing the narrative, a strong emphasis is placed on the accuracy of the provided information.²⁹ One audio guide starts by saying that ‘we should tell you exactly how events took place’,³⁰ while another tells the listener to ‘rest assured that, on our tour, you will be brought up to date on all the latest findings on the crimes’.³¹ In addition to this, the guides often aim to transport their users back in time, for instance through old photographs.³² They promise to ‘paint a picture of each site to help you to visualise the area as it was back in the late nineteenth century’,³³ or tell their users they will be ‘spirited back to the mean streets of the 19th century East End’.³⁴ In these guided tours, trail and narrative are brought together: transported back to the historical period, the users ‘watch’ the events unfold as they make their way through the area.

Cardiff’s walks are different, both in terms of the narrative and of the relationship to the past. The plot line of *The missing voice* is purposefully confusing, with answers to who is following whom and what mystery is being solved always out of reach; even the different characters in the recording cannot be clearly separated and the listener becomes lost almost immediately. Instead of a coher-

29 Blum provides a detailed discussion of the emphasis placed by tour guides on authoritative and truthful narratives (‘Murder, Myth, and Melodrama’, pp. 246–48).

30 Discovery Tours & Events, *Jack the Ripper Tour*, track 1.

31 ‘Guided by published authors’, www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com

32 Blum, ‘Murder, Myth, and Melodrama’, p. 251–253; ‘You’ll peruse Victorian photographs’, www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com; www.guidigo.com//Tour/London/United%20Kingdom/The-bloody-steps-of-Jack-the-Ripper/LmvHuGxYQnY. During the Secret Chambers Tour, historical photographs are projected directly onto walls during the walk, a method they promote as *Ripper-Vision* (rippervision.com/ripper-vision).

33 iAudioguide and BlueBrolly, *Jack the Ripper London audio guide*, track 2.

34 ‘Step into the autumn of terror’, www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com

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ent narrative, we are presented with fragments that work to communicate not facts but emotions. The artist tells us how she sometimes follows men, late at night when walking home, to feel protected. And there are references to people, including the artist (and thus the participant), being watched, followed and disappearing. Without ever referring to the violent history of the neighbourhood, the collection of incoherent fragments makes us aware of the danger of dark alleys, of being alone at night in the city, of encountering strangers. In the context of Whitechapel's history, it is easy to draw a connection to the fear felt by prostitutes wandering these streets at the time of the murders.

Secondly, the walks differ from standard audio guides in their relationship to the past. Instead of transporting the listener back to an earlier period, the echoes of these past events are brought to the present and are made relevant for the participant's current reality. After finishing the *The missing voice*, the participant is left with an acute awareness of her own presence in an area which held such danger. This refusal to transport the user back through time and present a narrative that is firmly in and of the past is also experienced in the *Alter Bahnhof* video walk. No linear narrative is provided and the recording consists of ambient noises from the train station, staged sounds accompanying things happening on screen and the voice-over of the artist, who recounts disjointed fragments of memories (hers and others'), dreams and philosophical questions concerning the phenomenon of memory. In this work, the oblique references to the Holocaust and the absence of a comprehensible narrative bring to mind our current understanding of trauma: while historical facts can help us gain a sense of control over an event, the experience of trauma is often described as the very inability to create such a narrative.³⁵ The video walk evokes this feeling through strange, incongruous images, which seem to take place in front of our very eyes. At some point an image appears of an underground tunnel, where a woman passes us, ominously counting in German. Later, this same woman is seen lying on the floor of the station, apparently having suffered a medical emergency. The nightmarish imagery is unsettling and brings the sense of traumatic memory, in need of processing, into the present-day train station. As in Whitechapel, both the video and the audio refuse to transport us back to a clear moment in history and, instead, allow us to feel the lingering effects of that history on our own reality.

This notable divergence from traditional audio guide practice is made explicit by elements in the works themselves; halfway into *The missing voice* we hear a tour guide in the background tell her listeners about the history of the area's

35 Erl, *Memory in Culture*, p. 87.

Jewish population. And in the *Alter Bahnhof video walk* the participant passes an old man recounting stories of the war and showing photos to a woman. In both cases these figures are noted by the participant as they relate what seem to be clear, coherent histories of the sites, so obviously missing from the artist's account. However, their stories remain just out of reach and the participant is pulled away and back into the present and onto the confusing trail set out by the artist.

What makes the artistic strategy particularly effective is the nature of the sites. Each can be understood as a location of dark tourism and, as such, emotion plays an essential role and memory comes to eclipse history.³⁶ The Whitechapel area represents a 'lighter' form, aimed mostly at entertainment and the enjoyment of sublime horror.³⁷ The station in Kassel, on the other hand, refers to one of the darkest forms, albeit through metonymy (the train station points indirectly to the camps it was connected to). Both sites are haunted by memories. In Kassel's train station, the artist tells us: 'Germany's like that for me, full of ghosts and history'. The artworks' refusal to control the sites through clarifying narratives magnifies this haunted atmosphere. It is further enhanced by the confusing design of the walks, discussed in the next section.

Anchored history versus unhinged memory

Much has been written about the ability of sound(scapes) to confuse our understanding, making a trail or site appear haunted and uncanny.³⁸ Gallagher describes it best when he writes:

In a context where representations of space often involve images with strong truth claims attached – maps, photographs, architectural drawings, landscape paintings and so on – environmental audio recordings are prone to being more elusive in their meanings: unverifiable, referentially unstable, hinting at things which are never quite fully revealed

36 The relatively new phenomenon of dark tourism has been discussed and defined by various authors (for an overview, see Hartmann, 'Dark Tourism, Thanatourism, and Dissonance'; Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, pp. 9–12). The book *Dark Tourism* by Lennon and Foley has become fundamental in these discussions. Their definition of the concept concerns sites which are marked by: 1) the role of global communication (newspapers, TV etc.) in creating an initial interest in the history of the site; 2) a sense of anxiety and doubt about the project of modernity that the site induces; and 3) an educative element of the site that invites visitors (p. 11). Both case studies correspond to all three aspects of this definition of dark tourism.

37 A discussion of the spectrum of dark tourism, from dark to light, can be found in Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, pp. 20–22.

38 Marshall, 'Audio-based Narratives for the Trenches of World War I', pp. 29–30; Cox, 'Sound Art and the Sonic Unconscious'; Gallagher, 'Sounding Ruins'; Foreman, 'Uncanny Soundscapes', pp. 266–68.

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... Environmental recordings are also ideal for amplifying the haunted qualities of sites, since by displacing the sounds of spaces they estrange, dislocate, render uncanny.³⁹

The spectres that haunt our two sites are memories from past events. Since cultural memory is itself unstable and constantly in flux, it is fittingly represented through the unstable medium of Cardiff's walks, in which every repetition is different. The artworks reflect the shape-shifting nature of memory. While the traditional audio guide is an anchoring text in Barthes' sense of the word, intended on fixing the meaning of the object, Cardiff's walks do the opposite: they unhinge and upend.⁴⁰ Three distinct aspects of the walks contribute to this effect and will be addressed below: the complex soundscape around the artist's voice; the mismatch between the described reality and the participant's observed reality; and the purposeful deception that is introduced, in the video walk in particular.

Although the focus in the audio tracks is on the artist's voice, the complex network of surrounding audio fragments is experienced as a soundscape through which the participant travels. This experience is made more striking, as well as confusing, by the binaural recording technique, which makes it hard to distinguish between past sounds in the recording and present sounds on the walk itself. Both the artist's voice and the soundscape are continuous, following the continuous movement of the participant. Most audio guides create a series of small arcs of attention – taking you from one point of interest to the next. In Cardiff's walks, however, a constant level of attention is maintained throughout the walk and, as a result, the listener is kept aware of both her surroundings and her movement through them as she follows the artist's footsteps. No distinction is made between fore- and background, i.e. relevant versus irrelevant, in either the walk, the surroundings or the sounds. All streets, buildings and people become potentially significant and pervaded with memory and meaning, resulting in an estranging intensity.⁴¹ As Pinder writes, the effect is 'to make you acutely aware of rhythm, pace, breath: of the practice of walking. It

39 Gallagher, 'Sounding Ruins', pp. 479–80.

40 Christensen, 'Four Steps in the History of Museum Technologies', pp. 17–20; Sohal ('Momentous Movement', pp. 55–57) discusses this estrangement in more detail, describing it as a result of a disturbance in the indexical relationship between the soundscape and the perceived reality of the participant; in other words, the sounds of the recording do not match up with the reality of the walking participant, which causes confusion.

41 Gorman ('Wandering and Wondering', p. 86) elaborates on the way in which the mundane everyday surroundings come to be seen through the eyes of the attentive tourist, using John Urry's theory of the 'tourist gaze' (*The Tourist Gaze*).

emphasizes the sensuousness of walking as a mode of apprehending the city.⁴²

Apart from estranging, the walks also disorient. Following a trail means navigating, finding the way, not getting lost. To this end, most guided tours (in books and audio guides) provide clear maps, photos and instructions – images with strong truth claims, in Gallagher’s words. Cardiff’s walks complicate the act of navigating by their unusually ‘fuzzy’ instructions: in *The missing voice* we try to align our footsteps with the sound of the artists’ and look for informal landmarks like the convenience store with the Coca-Cola sign or the orange restaurant. In the constantly evolving city, however, these markers are unstable and several have changed beyond recognition.⁴³ Even the starting point has altered dramatically and the Whitechapel gallery has had to install a little bookshelf to mimic the presence of the old library, in order for participants to find their way. Besides landmarks, the artist is constantly describing people, parades and cars, most of which will have disappeared even a minute after the artist’s passing them. In the video walk in Kassel, getting lost is less likely, due to the matching up of video and surroundings. But here, the addition of visual information makes the differences between the artist’s reality and that of the participant all the more apparent. Far from being frustrating, these effects are intriguing and add to the mystery of the walks and the sensation of being surrounded by memories. It emphasises the perpetual and confusing evolution of the city and its layered identity, an observation made explicit by the artist: ‘I wonder if the workers ever think about themselves as the changers of the city, the men that cover up the old stories, making room for new ones.’

Finally, the walk through Kassel’s train station also contains moments of purposeful deception, playful inconsistencies that shatter the illusion that the participant is following a straightforward and consistent representation of an earlier reality. When standing at a railing, overlooking the platform, on which a woman can be seen walking away, the artist says: ‘That’s me in the white coat down there. I remember lying in the hotel room that night, alone, watching a German black-and-white movie.’ Later, when we are looking out over the main hall, she points to a boy with headphones who is supposedly doing the video walk. These and other instances make the viewer aware of the constructed and contradictory nature of the video – how can the artist be seen on a platform, when she is supposedly recording the video, and how can the boy be performing

42 Pinder, ‘Ghostly Footsteps’, p. 5. Other personal descriptions of the effects on the participant’s senses are found in Gorman, ‘Wandering and Wondering’, pp. 84 and 87; Petralia, ‘Headspace: Architectural Space in the Brain’, p. 107; Tubridy, ‘Sounding Spaces’, p. 6.

43 De Certeau discusses this relationship between walking and the memory of the city in his influential essay ‘Walking in the City’ (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 105–08).

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the walk if he appears in the recording of that very walk? These incongruities make it impossible to truthfully reconstruct the artist's reality. We can never align our image, our experience, with hers. Every performance of the walk is an individual and unique one, following a fixed script but never able exactly to reconstruct previous performances. In this respect, the works mimic the nature of cultural memory: although the events form an unchanging script, the memory of the events is constantly reshaped by individuals relating them to their present realities. Over and over again, the same events become relevant to new people and the memory is shaped by these many iterations.

In the *Alter Bahnhof video walk*, the process of constructing memory is explicitly discussed by the artist on several occasions. As much as memories shape and define our identities, they also haunt us; the artist addresses this duality while leading us through the station:

Memories are like a different form of travel. It's like filling a suitcase that we pull behind us and we open and close when we need to ... What do other people do with memories they don't want? Do they just close the suitcase? Sometimes I imagine rolling bad memories into a ball, like a snowball, and throwing them away. It's only in the middle of the night they come back.

Performative memory

The process by which individuals perpetually (re)construct cultural memory is described by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney

as an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than reproductive. It is as much a matter of acting out a relationship to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories.⁴⁴

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, the active participation required in Cardiff's walks illustrates this construction of performative memory.⁴⁵ The memories attached to these sites are 'acted out' by the participants on both a personal, individual level and on a broader, public level.

Each performance of the walks is a personal and unique event. The many reviews and analyses of the walks attest to the transformative and intimate nature of this experience.⁴⁶ While following the trail, the participant has the sensation of being in multiple layers of time at once – the present moment

44 Erll and Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, p. 2.

45 Bertens, 'Doing Memory'.

46 Pinder, 'Ghostly Footsteps', p. 5. Other personal descriptions of the effects on the participant's senses are found in Gorman, 'Wandering and Wondering', pp. 84 and 87; Petralia, 'Headspace: Architectural Space in the Brain', p. 107; Tubridy, 'Sounding Spaces', p. 6.

of the performance, the moment of the artist's recording and the layers of older events – some fictional, some factual – to which the walks allude. The complex identity of the site is made explicit as its many ghosts and echoes of memory become almost palpable. The individual memory of walking through Whitechapel or Kassel's train station becomes contextualised in a wider network of cultural memory.

Apart from the personal experience of the individual performing the walk, the artworks also increase public awareness of the cultural memory of these locations. In both cases, few direct references to the events remain. Until 1988, Whitechapel boasted a pub called *The Jack the Ripper*, filled with Ripper memorabilia; it was one of the few tangible references to the events. Notably, it was pressured into changing its name, after a campaign against sensationalising the murders – a demonstration of the power still exerted by the memory of the events.⁴⁷ And in the Kassel train station only the Horst Hoheisel monument reminds travellers of the Jewish deportees from this town.

It is therefore mostly through intangible acts of remembrance that the memories are kept alive. Walking through Whitechapel at night, one is certain to come across guided tours about the Ripper murders and thus to be reminded of the area's history.⁴⁸ As in the case of right-of-way paths, discussed by Hickman and O'Hara in this volume, the act of walking is itself performative, adding to the identity and reality of the surroundings and keeping cultural memories alive.⁴⁹ Cardiff's walks function in similar ways. On each occasion that I have performed the video walk in Kassel, I have been approached by passers-by, wondering what these people with headphones and iPods were doing. The effect of the walks extends beyond the experience of individual participants. In both cases Cardiff's artworks add to the act of constructing and of maintaining cultural memory.

47 Begg, *Jack the Ripper*, p. 22; Hanlon, 'On the Ripper's Bloody Trail'. The reputation of the pub was based on the claim that it had been frequented by two of the murder victims.

48 A discussion of the active role of tourism in shaping the myth of Jack the Ripper and his importance to Whitechapel can be found in Blum, 'Murder, Myth, and Melodrama', pp. 240–46.

49 De Certeau's understanding of walking as an enunciative act is helpful in this respect: 'Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks".' (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 99). A discussion of this power of walking, taking De Certeau's thoughts as a starting point, can be found in Morris ('What We Talk About When We Talk about "Walking in the City"'). Sohal ('Momentous Movement', p. 69–72) considers the relevance of De Certeau's thoughts in direct relation to the audio walks by Cardiff, *The missing voice* in particular.

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Conclusion

As a performative process, cultural memory is under perpetual construction and in need of constant and active attention. Individual actions help keep shared memories alive and these memories, in turn, alter the identities of the spaces that we pass through. While grounded in historical events, the memories take on constantly changing shapes and significances of their own, responding to the needs and desires of people in the present.

The complex process of cultural remembrance has been explored by artists through various methods. The audio and video walks by Janet Cardiff do so in the form of guided walks, emphasising the relationship between the act of following trails and the cultural memories attached to environments. This embodies what Caitlin DeSilvey has called 'kinetic memory', referring to the idea that memory is experienced and constructed through movement: 'kinesis, rather than stasis, creates the condition of possibility for the performance of memory'.⁵⁰

The two artworks discussed in this chapter have illustrated the strength of this strategy; the experience of estrangement and confusion, as well as the active audience participation allow individual participants to explore the memories attached to the two trails as well as the phenomenon of remembrance itself. And in addition to their individual significances, the multiple performances of the trail, in turn, help perpetuate and shape site-specific cultural memory. The artist's seemingly arbitrary trails become explicit 'artefacts of movement', to borrow a phrase from this volume's introduction. By walking these trails, we carve paths through the built environment in which memory can live on.

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50 DeSilvey ('Memory in Motion', p. 493).

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