

Walking workshop

for creating sound images

by Joan Jones



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Introduction

My piece *Gloomy Mayhill Walk* was a response to a writing prompt given to me by artist and writer Laura Reeves. She asked me to, via the medium of narrative, give her a personalised guided tour of an area of Swansea. Instantly I knew where I wanted to take the reader. Growing up in Mayhill, and then returning there in my thirties, there are certain parts of the local landscape that are imbued for me with memories of growing up, many of them painful. It was very cathartic for me to take the reader places you wouldn't usually choose to go to; places even I still find difficult to go.

Walking for me is integral to my practice. If I'm trying to get a feel for an idea or come up with words for something, I walk. Through the rhythm of walking I find I can enter into a magical, meditative sur-state which for me is the opposite of "thought." I slip into the lyrical realm, I turn off the thinking mind and tune into the vibration of poetry. It is here I find release. It is in this almost trance-like state that my conflicts are resolved.



The artist walk is a strong tradition in contemporary practice, from Turner to the Situationist International. Situationist Guy De Bord created the notion of the *dérive* (from the French "to drift"), as a practice, participants would undergo an unplanned journey through a given landscape, usually urban, dropping everyday expectations with a view to stimulating artworks through psychogeographical exploration. This was connected to the French notion of the flâneur, an individual who casually saunters about observing society. De Bord viewed the *dérive* as a revolutionary act and an integral part to the counter-capitalist project of situationism.

Under the current circumstances, our (now government prescribed) walks seem more valuable than ever. Although I am a habitual walker anyway, over the recent weeks my walks have been transformed. I find I am slowing down, noticing even more than I would ordinarily. I have always wanted to get better at knowing the names of trees, and I am taking the time to do that now. This is a time fraught with anxiety and filled with terrible uncertainties. For me the walks are a balm for that, a route to mindfulness, guiding me away from whatever fretful thoughts I may be having back into nature, the recent sunshine and newly cleaner air, or into the weirdness of our newly-deserted streets.

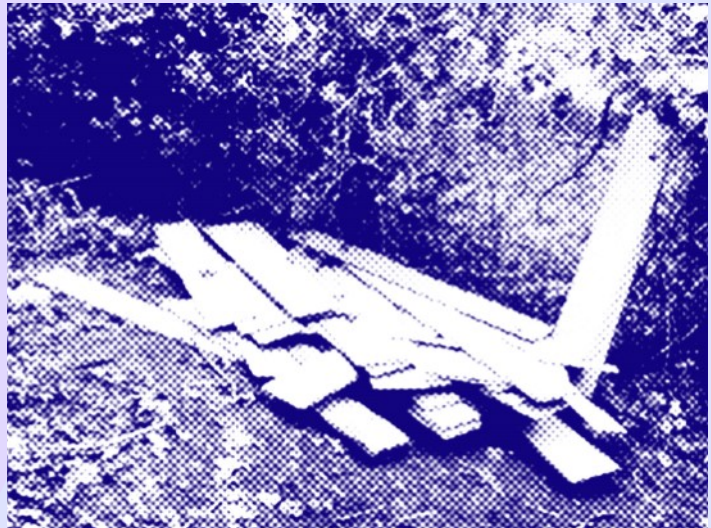
I have designed the following workshop with a view to incorporating some of the ideas of the *dérive* paired with techniques of mindfulness and walking. It is a chance to get out, look at the world around you a bit differently, examine our current landscape and make a record of your thoughts about it.

Joan Jones

Your task is simple

You will need:

- Smartphone *or* digital camera
- Voice recorder on Smartphone *or* digital dictaphone



Task:

Designate a time to take an uninterrupted walk of 1 hour duration.

There should be no "purpose" to your walk. No destination.

Do not plan this walk, make no itinerary. Drop any expectations and simply let yourself "drift."

As you walk take deep breaths and try to enter into a perceptive state. Pay special attention to the world around you and attempt to lose yourself in your environment.

There should be no distractions on this walk such as iPods.
If you are using a Smartphone as your instrument,
set it to flight mode.

As you get lost in your walk certain scenes might
appear to you.

Things to see might "pop up."

When inspiration takes you, take a picture.

To accompany the image, use
your device to record yourself
saying 2-3 sentences about
what you see. Try to do this
Quickly and without
thinking about
it too much.

What you can hear as you take the photo?

What can you smell?

What sensations do you have in your body?

What memories does the scene stimulate?

What ideas spontaneously arise from what you are viewing?

The image and the sound presented together form a sound-image.

Limit yourself to 3-4 sound-images per journey.

This exercise may be repeated as often as you like.

If you need assistance on your walk the exercise can be done with a partner.

Limit conversation as much as possible and remember to stay safely socially distanced.

We would love to hear your stories and see the journeys you take around your local area.

‘Swansea Stories’ is an evolving archive of different voices, that highlight the personal and historical narratives that continue to shape our changing City.

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