*E*touring: processes for creative-critical explorations of urban sites

Do we want a gadget that can see through buildings or do we want learners who can find cracks in the concrete?

Juliet Sprake, Goldsmiths College

"*E*touring releases learners from teachers' interference and supports their own decision-making and allows them to be proactive – they make a decision, act, and something happens. It could be fruitful, a mistake, a disaster. So *e*touring offers teaching opportunities for developing evaluative skills as higher order thinking skills. *E*touring really helps the kids' to make their own learning opportunities – and that, to me, is sacrosanct."

"Walking is a metaphor for
going forward,
for making choices about
going positively in a
direction."

Ambulation parallels this thinking and decision-making and is a
method for engaging emotionally and sensually with the built
environment. Walking is a core element of *e*touring.

"The tour is a medium for developing independent learning."

Mobile technologies provide the infrastructure for a learning web in which learners know when and how to access expert knowledge as they move between objects, people and places. Technologies that mobilise.

***E*touring** processes are contingent on what *propels* participants to move around a building or through buildings. What motivates the next move is explored through these processes that set up particular kinds of learning activity dependent on interpretation of location.

Key attributes of the mobile learner:

'stumbling upon'

'noticing'

'connecting'

Moving through a process of enquiry – from describing to associating:

Walking & recording finds

Producing trails of finds

Identifying patterns and layers of located finds

Inviting others to make conjectures

Theoretical positioning

Wood (1992) argues that every form of mapping forms a discourse; maps are polemical, disputatious, controversial in their arguments with other maps. Poverty maps, insurance maps and historical maps present ways into discoursing the map as a representation of reality. If such maps converse with other maps they become active (rather than a flat set of semiotic codes) and Wood suggests that the map surface itself is constructed out of hosts of propositions making a claim. Wood highlights a dialogue to be had between static, formal closedness in the language of maps and the dynamic openness that users can bring to mapping processes.

Focused activity - 'Keying King's Cross'

Digitally overlaying Booth's poverty map of 1889 with the 2006 A-Z of the King's Cross area, users discuss how 'quality' of an area can be coded through production of a key. Cross-hatching through colouring areas provide users with a debating forum about subjective quality indicators of place.
Project: *Cracking Maps*

Wider learning application

Subjective knowledge about living in a place can actively contribute to mapping that environment where the map produced becomes a discursive project - that, in a sense, is never complete as other users join the discussion and different views and issues annotate the map.
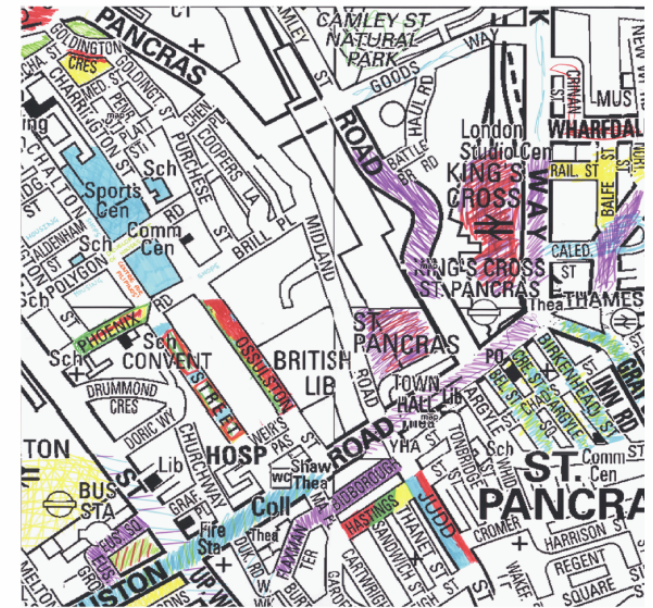
Theoretical positioning

The participant is asked to conceptually and physically move between times and spaces and it is this movement that actually creates the event; sensing our own movement in space rather than understanding it by way of sight or moving between rather than 'seeing' from one viewpoint. The combination of actual motion of the participant with multiplicity of narratives resonates with what Guliana Bruno calls the motion of emotion – or *e*motion.

Focused activity

Users wander through and over the landscaped area listening for the sound of the buried stream. When they hear the sound of water, they have found it. Users continue wandering, plotting the movement of the stream that day.
Project: *Mudlarking in Deptford*

Wider learning application

Creative researching processes that invite participants to use sound to annotate known and unknown sites through making audio recordings that reflect multi-sensory explorations of site. Use of audio to both find your way and lay a trail of clues for others can evoke a sense of place that invites reproduction in the mind and actions of the listener.

Theoretical positioning

Characteristics of the ilegal tour guide:

* Engages in a complicit partnership with participants
* Deliberately confuses intended meaning with actual meaning
* Indulges in escapades
* Bypasses conventional routes
* Makes critical itineraries

Focused activity - 'Finding your way round the British Library'

You can use your voice and bodies to produce a different kind of map. Our guide shows that everyone has a different perspective, voices have a personality and everyone takes different journeys. We negotiated the "don't go" and the "shush-ness" as we discovered and tested the boundaries. Try out some of our ideas or invent your own and make an audio recording to add to this page.

Wider learning application

Creatively negotiating perceived boundaries through a complicit relationship between guide and participant opens up opportunities for occupying those borders and intervening in that space.

Ground Floor and Upper Ground Floor

there seem to be people praying in corners

in honour of african and asian studies do the beyonce booty shake

the water in the fountain is really warm

refrain from making eye contact in the lift

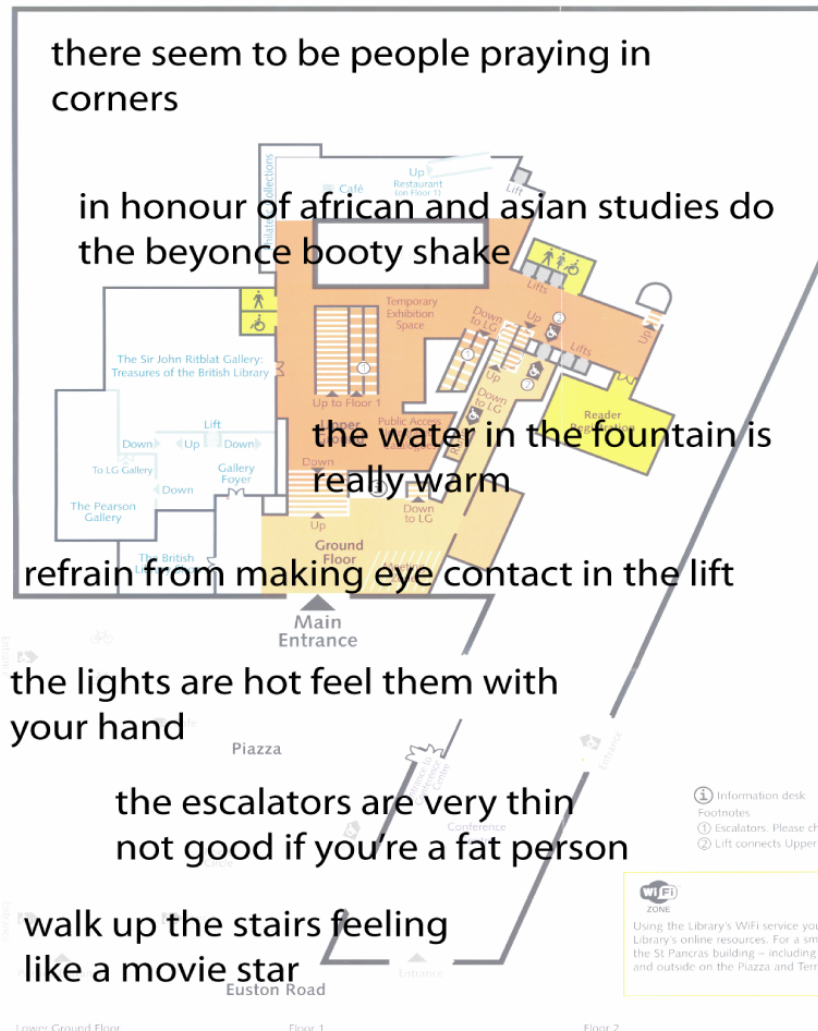the lights are hot feel them with your hand

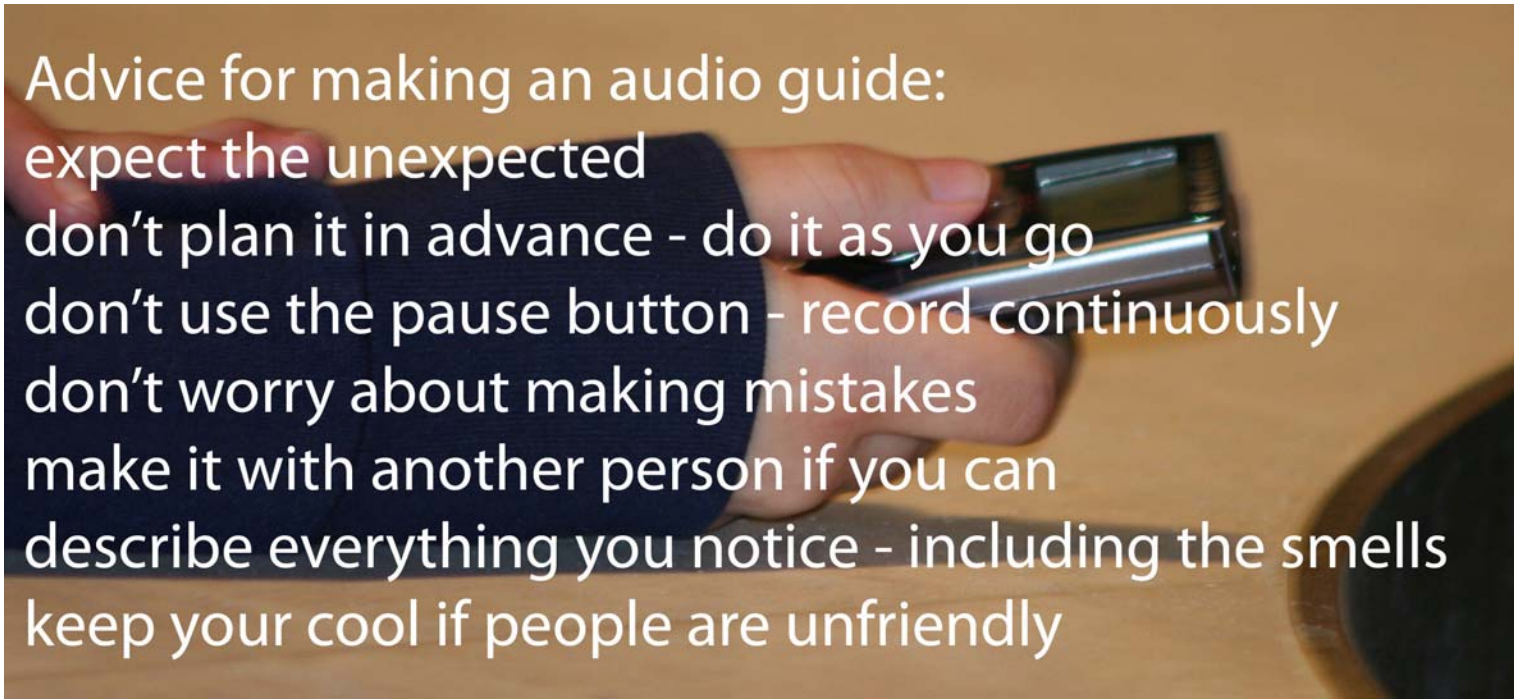the escalators are very thin not good if you're a fat person

walk up the stairs feeling like a movie star

Advice for making an audio guide:
expect the unexpected
don't plan it in advance - do it as you go
don't use the pause button - record continuously
don't worry about making mistakes
make it with another person if you can
describe everything you notice - including the smells
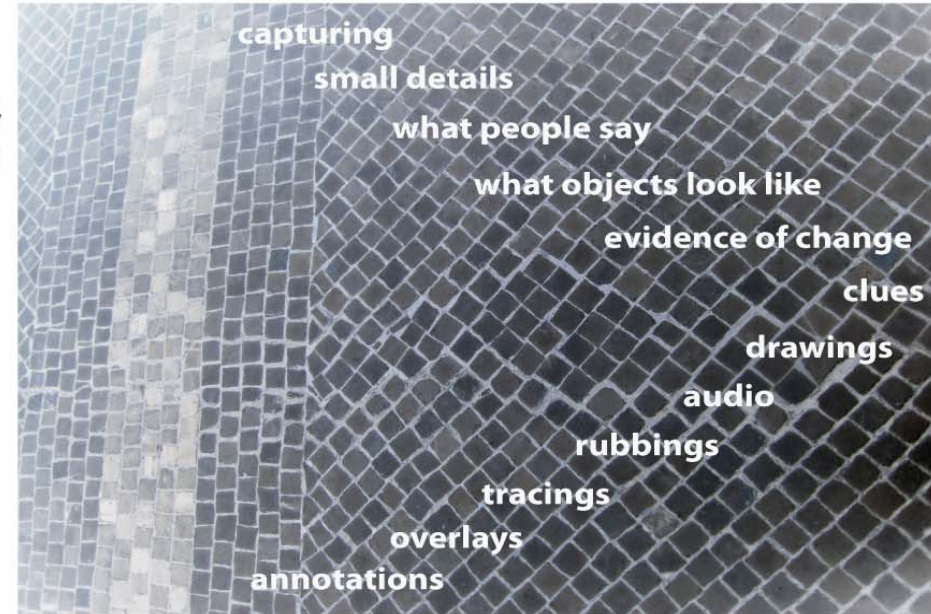keep your cool if people are unfriendly

Theoretical positioning

The word geo-graph can be defined as 'write the earth' and object-graph as 'write the object'. Object-graphy as a constructive process that interprets material properties of the object - through physical inscription (marks, traces, scars), stories of use, together with positionality of the collector/finder - sets up a new paradigm for considering interactivity of the learner-visitor in 'writing' the object.

Focused activity - 'Finding Futureplan'

Learners are given a toolkit (digital voice recorder, digital camera, drawing/casting materials) to map evidence of physical-material change in an institutional space - initally in school and then at the V&A museum. They use micromapping skills to notice and record small-scale details that evidence each site as a transitional space. These findings are then collected into trail threads to guide visitors in object-graphy.

Project: *Transitional Spaces at the V&A*

capturing
small details
what people say
what objects look like
evidence of change
clues
drawings
audio
rubbings
tracings
overlays
annotations

Wider learning application

Accessing spaces 'behind the hoardings' or 'under the floorboards' gives learners opportunities to access the everyday workings that prompts the making of material trails – an experiential mode of discovery that exploits tagging objects into time-space collections.

It was easy to record specific (quiet) sounds to give a real visual (easy to imagine) idea of where we were. We found it hard to be organised and switch the recorder off because we would miss things.
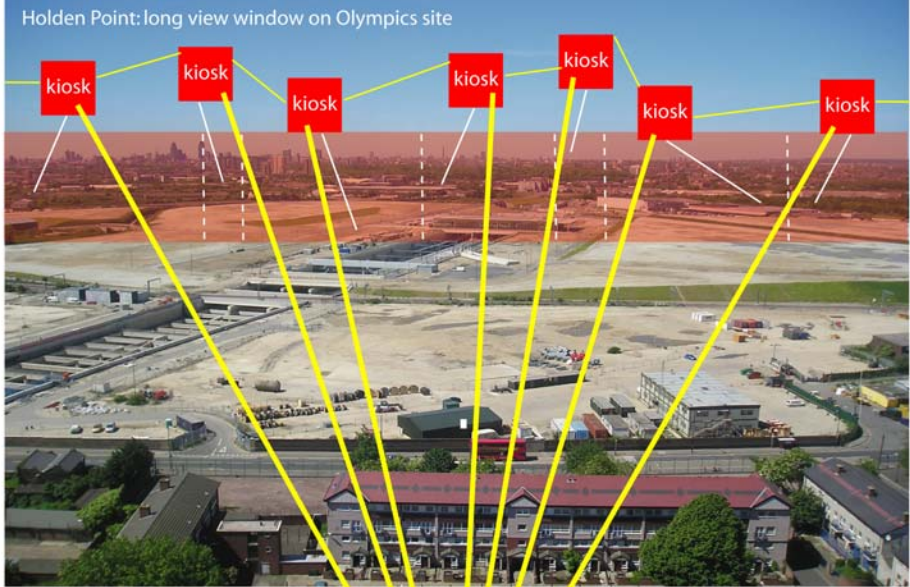
Prospecting

It may have been that Hollar's sight differed so much in his two eyes that he did not have binocular vision, and effectively used only one eye or the other at any given moment. What is self-evident is that, by one shift or another, he did achieve amazing clarity both for distant scenes and for minute things close at hand... (Tindall 2003: 93)

Negotiating access to the top of buildings and setting up guidelines for producing topological maps of an area through climbing upwards and recording position and selected view to scope a terrain.
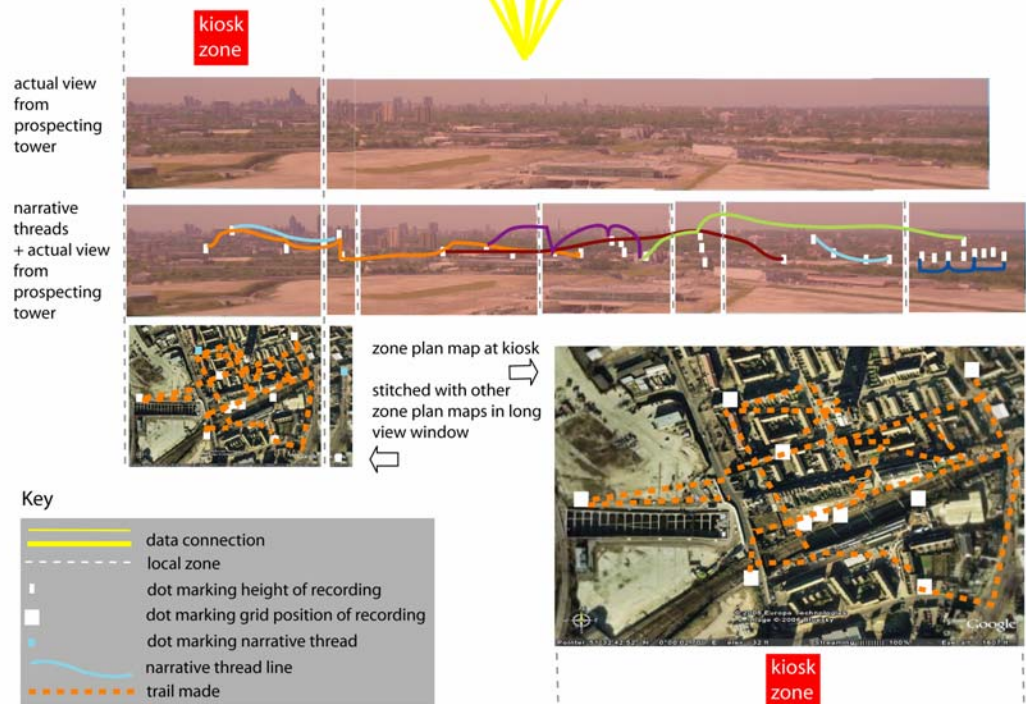
Populating prospects through collecting and recording objects and people as 'finds'. Relations between objects are drawn through participants making and publishing object-trails for others to follow and evolve, connecting subjective knowledge with materiality of the built environment.

Merging topographical with grid data to produce an interactive, collectively produced and located urban long view based on proximity, position and movement of participants.

Learners are described as interrogators, diggers, plotters or taggers depending on the nature of the activity they are involved in.

Holden Point: long view window on Olympics site

kiosk kiosk kiosk kiosk kiosk kiosk kiosk

Excavating Concrete
Stratford, London

kiosk zone

actual view from prospecting tower

narrative threads + actual view from prospecting tower

zone plan map at kiosk
stitched with other zone plan maps in long view window

Key

▬▬	data connection
- - -	local zone
▪	dot marking height of recording
◻	dot marking grid position of recording
◼	dot marking narrative thread
∿	narrative thread line
⋯	trail made

kiosk zone

Locative media prospecting:

• uses topological mapping as a measure of social proximity

• invites learners to find and challenge what constitutes urban public space

• provides a platform for collective curiosity in finding, locating and debating transition in urban environments

In relation to the creative collaborations it narrates and places together, it does not come to the point. It provides instead a platform on which their connections can be grasped. Now it is time to catch flies.
(Carter 2004: 194)

"Its fun for a change to be listened to instead of having to listen."

"When I first came here I didn't know any facts about the area and didn't bother about the environment. But now I've learned about the environment, history and facts about the Creek."

"We need to go back"
"That's it go on!"
"Now what do I do?"