

## **Encouraging research and group cohesion through walking art.**

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## REPORT ON FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM

*Group research taken during Red Week April 2015*

By Annie Watson and Jeremy Lee

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### **Where To? Steps Towards the Future of Walking Arts**

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Falmouth University

An international Symposium.

Hosted by the Articulating Space Research Centre in partnership with the AHRC Walking Artist Network.

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## 1. Abstract

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### Encouraging Research and Group Cohesion through Walking Art.

How does a free form response to making work, gained through the act of walking, contribute to the occurrence of creative discoveries and genuine knowledge in and around media arts practice?

A group presentation from Media Arts, Sheffield Hallam University.

<b>Annie Watson</b>	<i>Subject Group Leader - Film and Photography</i>
<b>Jeremy Lee</b>	<i>Programme Lead - Media Arts.</i>
<b>Mark Parkin</b>	<i>Senior Lecturer - Cinematography</i>
<b>Melvyn Ternan</b>	<i>Course Leader - Animation</i>
<b>Susannah Gent</b>	<i>Senior Lecturer - Filmmaking</i>
<b>Sonya Robinson</b>	<i>Senior Lecturer - Photography</i>
<b>Andrew Robinson</b>	<i>Senior Lecturer - Photography</i>

As a subject group, we have a history of walking, and the idea for this group has grown out of our own research interests. We are coming from a diverse practice area, (moving image, photography, sound, writing, 3D, games design and animation) and walking regularly has been cohesive as a way of enabling conversation and collaboration.

Our portfolio group is made up of award-winning practitioners and industry experts, but we lack a distinctive and strong history of academic research.

Along with current university strategies around increasing the numbers of research active staff and in order to develop staff profiles, we recognized that there needed to be an inclusive mechanism that allowed staff to develop their research interest.

Annie Watson and Jeremy Lee set up the group initially as a response to a funding bid. The first Wednesday afternoon of every month is cleared of teaching and meetings, to enable all staff to walk together. We have been fully supported and encouraged by our executive management.

The inclusive Media Arts Walking Research Group has become a forum for practice and reflection, where the group acts as a vessel, enabling individuals and collaborations to generate their own areas of research interest. Seven members will present their individual area of research at the symposium.

The benefits of group research are more than just the individual research outputs. Conversations have been playful and inventive. Trust, respect and understanding has developed between colleagues as well as the obvious aspects of wellbeing associated with walking.

## 2. Summary of the day

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- We introduced the Sheffield Hallam Media Arts Walking Research Group to the symposium, describing it's purpose and vision as well as presenting seven individual research projects, that have been developed through the walking group.
- We displayed a poster, each of us holding a QR code linking to our websites, blogs and work. (URLs are included at the end of this paper).



- A selection of our work was shown during Cornish pasty and Cream tea breaks. <https://vimeo.com/124806642>



“Seeing how others were utilising walking as a vehicle for research in Politics, Technology and medical research really helped me place what my area of research is within the group. Seeing people presenting papers at an actual conference for the first time also helped me understand the economics of publishing research.”

*Susannah Gent*



“Falmouth was the first conference I had been to, and although our presentation was short, the experience of the day was hugely educational in the sense that I now have an idea of how this sort of event unfolds and feel much more confident about applying to others. Once again, it was great to be away with colleagues and this will further contribute to the working environment feeling friendly and supportive.” *Melvyn Ternan*





“What struck me most about the day was how relatively quickly (less than a year) we have gone from not existing as a group, to presenting seven individual outputs and being discussed within the international walking arts community as ‘Sheffield Hallam walking arts group’.” *Annie Watson*



“The work shown was either performative or collaborative whereas we are using the walking process in a different way – more as a catalyst to encourage and develop individual research outputs. The beer wasn’t very good and I started to think about which boat to own. And shipwrecks. And Poldark. And Jamaica Inn.” *Jeremy Lee*



“What I found of specific note was the practice based nature of our presentations, using the activity of walking as a space to engage with a wide range of visual led research, some of which directly relates to walking, some not. This distinction of The Media Arts Research Walking Group, relative to the vast majority of presentations at Falmouth which were concerned with walking as performance, supported by the image as document is something that as a group we may wish to take forward into the proposal stage for a walking arts symposium held in Sheffield.



The Media Arts Research Walking Group has given me a focus and support for the development of my research and practice, to the extent that I am in the process of putting forward an application for a practice based PhD.” *Sonya Robinson*

“The main benefit of the walks has been the creation of a space and time in which I can not only interact with other members of our staff team as practitioners and researchers but also make new work. The work itself, whilst leading to finished outputs, is also a form of exploratory action based research allowing me to develop ideas and strategies for future projects. Whilst neither documenting the walks nor specifically about walking, it wouldn’t exist without the walks and the company of my colleagues. Having the chance to focus our practice through a joint presentation at the Falmouth symposium was extremely beneficial as was the opportunity it allowed for us to compare our approach to walking arts with those of the other artists present.” *Andrew Robinson*

### 3. Presentation.

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The university research centre (ADRC) offered us a sum of money to generate new research in our department (Media Arts). We currently have very few active researchers and quickly decided that a walking group might offer the best solution to facilitate this for us. There is a large international community within this field and we recognised an opportunity to be a part of this and the prospect for staff development and research openings.

As the Media Arts area encompasses a diverse range of subjects, including Photography, Film, Animation, Digital Media Production, Games Design, Sound, and Visual Effects it was important that we had a vessel that could contain and encourage individual practice from any area and enable staff to meet and discuss whatever was needed without being prescriptive.

With the money, we went on two residencies. The first was in July and allowed us time and space away from the university to consider what the research project might be and how it might evolve. It was also the first time that a lot of us had spoken to each other about anything other than work, which allowed us to connect in many different ways, across various disciplines, finding commonalities and shared research interests. The second residency was after the Summer break, giving us time to think about the kind of research we'd like to develop individually.

It was important right from the beginning that this group should be inclusive and supportive. All staff (around 30) in Media Arts were invited to join, whether they were experienced or early career researchers. The first Wednesday of every month was cleared from meetings and teaching in timetables to allow all staff to take part in the regular walks. This was wholly supported by the university, who see the group as a good example of encouraging staff to become research active.

To date, we've been on around 10 walks, had 3 residencies, and are going to the Black Forest in July for a week. There are around 15 members of the group who regularly come on walks.

One of the challenges we are now facing is how we continue to fund and develop the walking research group without it becoming singularly owned, maintaining its integrity as a vessel for research within the media arts area at Sheffield Hallam.

Fortunately at this time it fits very well within the University Research Strategy in developing new research and researchers.

We are benefitting from the fact that we are all getting to know each other and becoming slightly fitter.



## Sonya Robinson



### The Refusal of the Image

'The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses'.  
Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

The premise of my research is the unnameable and unrepresentable origin of the 'image in trauma'. As an adopted twin I am driven to rewrite a history without beginning, to endlessly make and re-make images in an attempt to find an image, an image from childhood, the first image. On this slate, this tabula rasa all images slide and disappear, there is nothing to hold them. It is flashback without image – a screen of invisibility comprehensible only as 'affect'. In *Understanding Trauma, A Psychoanalytic Approach* Caroline Garland states 'the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent which is still at work...' (1998, p. 13) To modify Freud's concept of the dream as the 'royal road to the unconscious', through tangible images that serve to cover an underlying reality something is disclosed in its unrepresentability.

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## Annie Watson

### KnitWalks



I've been knitting for most of my life and I really like these photos of women knitting whilst walking – they're carrying milk, balancing barrels on their heads, carrying babies, wearing clogs and walking barefoot, knitting in between gutting fish...and they're knitting complex patterns with multiple needles and colours.

I just wanted to try knitting and walking.

## MEDIA ARTS WALKING RESEARCH GROUP

I change the colour for every walk, and the knitting is informed by the weather, conversation and terrain. Too cold, dark or boggy, I drop stitches. Sometimes I'm talking so much, and gesturing with my hands instead of knitting and little gets done. If the terrain is smooth and easy, the weather warm, and I'm listening more than talking, the stitches are good and the walk produces a large section.

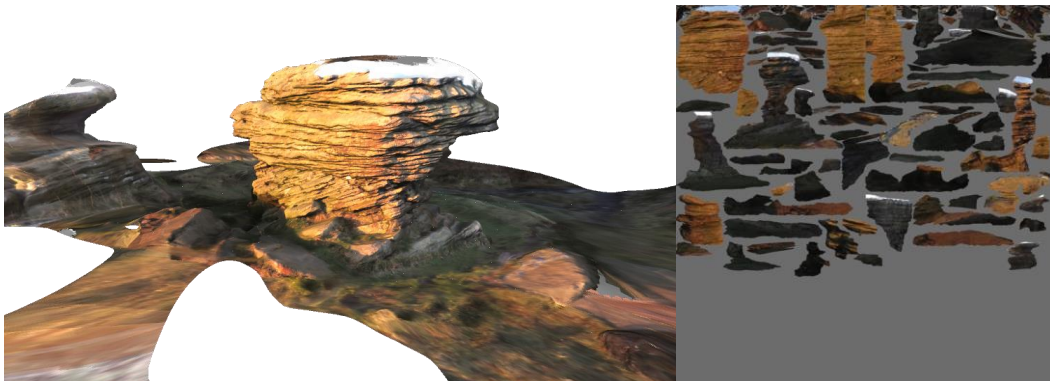


The knitting is a map of walks, each one defined through colour, amount and quality of stitches.

I document the journey using two cameras – one strapped to my head filming the view, the other filming my hands. It's a kind of performance – I'm not entirely sure where its going yet, or how it will be presented – I like the idea that although I am producing an object, that it's the walks themselves that are the main event.

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## Jeremy Lee



I come from a family of artists and brought up in the Peak District National Park, I have always been involved in the landscape either in leisure or in my practice.

My interests and practice lie in the new digital world of 3D and Visual Effects.

We can now, using our digital devices to scan and recreate, replicate areas of landscape and/or objects to view at our leisure or turn into game environments and now even print out to have as tangible solid objects to hold.

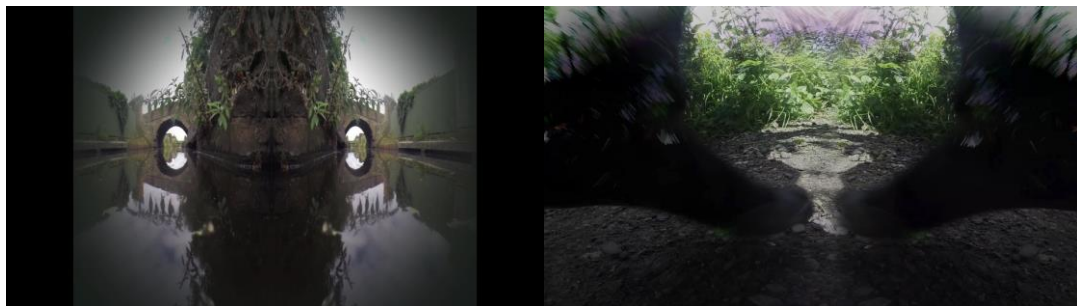
My question and research is how we might use this new technology to be creative and how we relate to these new digital versions of landscape.



One practical aspect and outcome of my interest and also leisure is a 3D bouldering guide app which will hopefully be coming out soon.

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## Su Gent



Although walking may be seen, primarily seen as a physical activity, the mind, according to the recent neuroscientific study of Antonio Damasio, may have come about as a result of the “spectacular consequence of the brain’s incessant and dynamic mapping” (2012). The use of maps to navigate landscape, the use of neural maps of the body within the brain and the mapping of environments and experiences in the form of memory suggest novel approaches to tackling the problem of filming a walk.





## MEDIA ARTS WALKING RESEARCH GROUP

In Chapter 3 of *Artists with PhDs*, edited by James Elkins, 2009, Henk Slager, in discussing 'Art and Method' suggests;

*"The artist compels us to see the world in a different way...and art proposes polymorphic kinds of observation. Through merely visual means, the artist succeeds in making visible what ordinary vision fails to see."*

Thus I see art practise as a form of research, creating potential dialogue through presenting metaphorical renderings of the subjective experience.

SLAGER, Henk, Art and Method, in *Artists with PhDs: On the new doctoral degree in studio art*, ed.

James Elkins, USA, New Academia Publishing, 2009, pp. 54

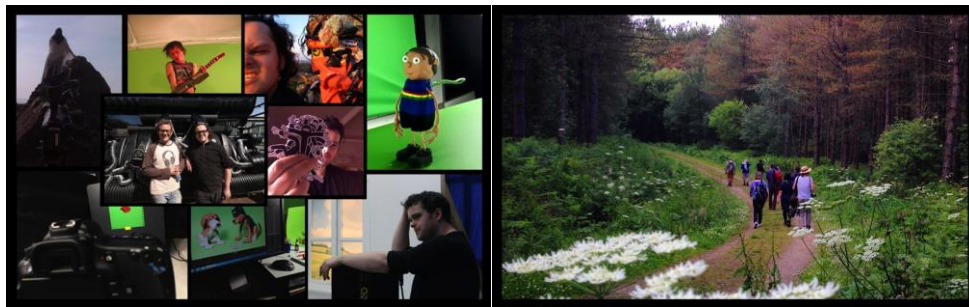
DAMASIO, Antonio, *Self Comes to Mind*, London: Vintage, 2010

RAMACHANDRAN, V.S., and William Hirstein, The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6, no. 6-7, 1999, pp. 15-51

MASSEY, Irving, *The Neural Imagination: Aesthetic and Neuroscientific Approaches to the Arts*, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2009, pp.83

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## Melvyn Ternan



After becoming a freelance animator in 2001 I've worked on over 150 client projects covering many areas of the animation industry.

As a Senior Lecturer in Animation, I now find myself surrounded by the projects of amazing students, each developing their own ideas from scratch.

It's an inspiring experience, but I often find myself, late in the animation studio wondering "What's next?"

I joined the Walking Group with no idea of what I wanted to utilize it for.

No specific research area excited me enough and frustration set in. At the heart of my frustration, I wanted to get away from technology, techniques, software, current industry work and other peoples Ideas.

I wanted ideas of my own to work on, for the sake of the idea.



Setting out on each walk with nothing more than a notepad and pencil and an app on my phone I track my walking route and mark specific points with images, video and sound clips when I become conscious of a notion or influence.

I now have two planned pieces of work that I want to complete based on ideas of my own, directly influenced by nothing but the experience of walking and the environment around me.

My research is based on looking at “The environmental impact on idea genesis” or “The Idea of Ideas”

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## Andrew Robinson



*Chatsworth House to Dingle Wood, Derbyshire - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014.*

My participation in the Research walking group is an extension of an investigation of the journey as a creative, conceptual and contemplative space along with an interest in the role of the accident and ‘found subject’ in the creation of photographic work.



## MEDIA ARTS WALKING RESEARCH GROUP



*Service Station Journal (South)*  
*Spring Bank Holiday Monday, 2012.*



*Service Station Journal (North)*  
*August Bank Holiday Monday, 2012.*

This is a development of my recent work “Service Station Journal” where I made two 24 hour motorway journeys stopping only at service stations to wander for the maximum permissible time of 2 hours, exploring the interior and exterior environments and photographing what caught my attention.



*Service Station Journal, Bank Street Arts, Sheffield. Summer, 2013*

Here the formal structure of the project provided both a strict framework and at the same time an creative opportunity to respond in an intuitive and open manner. The work was produced as a pair of books and installation and exhibited at Bank Street Arts, Sheffield in 2013.



*Kettlewell to Starbottom, Wharfedale, North Yorkshire – 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015.*

My engagement with the Research Walking Group has resulted in a work in progress entitled ‘Nine Walks’ ([http://anthology.co.uk/photos\\_project\\_walking.html](http://anthology.co.uk/photos_project_walking.html)) which in addition to furthering my exploration of the creative potential of the journey also explores an interest in how the act of photographing and the subsequent editing and sequencing of imagery creates connections between places and spaces.



As a development of my current walking practice I plan to retrace the route taken by my Uncle in 1946 when he cycled home from school camp in the Yorkshire Dales after falling ill, an act that would ultimately mark an important turning point in his life.

The walk will provide both imagery and a framework for a new body of work exploring landscape, memory and myth.

*Alan on Uncle Tom's Motorcycle (circa 1938)*

## Mark Parkin

### PALIMPSEST I



I've used the Walking Research Group as an opportunity to address and exploit a dichotomy in my practice as a writer and cinematographer working primarily in narrative film. I've done this by selecting two framing devices.

Firstly, identifying *The Woods* as a location to walk and develop work, drawing on a number of cultural references. Secondly, using the idea of walking specifically, and film/art derived from it, as forms of *Palimpsest* – one text written over another, partially erasing it. While the acts of rewriting and reworking are central to narrative film and I also wanted to compare established 'structures' to the physical, social, psychic phenomenon of the 'Desire Path'.

### PALIMPSEST II: 'BABYLEGS'



*Babylegs* is a film/writing project that articulates the idea of palimpsest in genre and myth – especially folk and fairytales. We rework the walks – real and imagined – of children through these ancient Rackhamesque woods. These elements/rushes/fragments are then reworked, with children as co-authors, in the studio with real sets and virtual environments. This reimagining draws in part on the work of Moon, Carter, together with Kitano's 'Card Narratives' and Favat/Piaget – *The Child in the Tale* – as an interpretation of the work of the Brothers Grimm.

### PALIMPSEST III - 'An Old Wood. And Deep'



**Work in Progress**

An engagement with history, and the imaginary, by walking and making in two locations, this work is also a physical realization of the palimpsest made by passing 16/35mm film through a camera twice – once in each wood/forest. Film images will be ‘half-made’ in this wood on the outskirts of Sheffield.

It was here, in a POW camp, that Karl Donitz, the final Nazi leader, was held for 6 weeks at the end of the First World War. His diaries suggest it was then he conceived of the idea of the ‘Wolf Pack’. What is certain was that he feigned madness to ensure transfer to hospital. This camp was subsequently overbuilt with a WWII camp, and this is now in ruins. Film will be ‘over and underwritten’ with images of the Black Forest drawing on the so-called ‘degenerate’ art of Kirchner and Ernst and the postwar response to the ‘imagined forest’ found in the work of Gunter Grasse, Beuys and Anselm Kiefer. History, Memory, Image are fractured and contested.



**An Old Wood. And Deep: Production Still.**



## 4. Future proposals

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On the back of this symposium, our aims are to:

1. Host a Sheffield Hallam Walking Arts symposium/conference in June/July 2016, possibly in conjunction with Darcy White's Landscape proposal.
2. Invite walking artists onto our walks (*Alison Lloyd, who is doing her PhD on women artists who walk, came with us on our most recent one*).
3. Submit papers to further conferences (both as a group and individually). (*Susannah Gent presented the body of work done with the walking research group to illustrate her methodology at the METHOD conference at SHU in April 2015*).
4. Develop international connections (*we have already booked a trip to Germany in July 2015*).
5. Continue to look for suitable gallery spaces to exhibit our own work, developed through the group.
6. Maintain the walks on the first Wednesday of every month. Ideally, these hours, would come out of the research allocation (and therefore out of STD), rather than the current SMT.

## 5. Links to our work

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<b>Sonya Robinson</b>	<a href="http://sonyarobinson.wordpress.com">http://sonyarobinson.wordpress.com</a>
<b>Annie Watson</b>	<a href="http://anniewatson.wix.com/knitwalks">http://anniewatson.wix.com/knitwalks</a>
<b>Susannah Gent</b>	<a href="http://susannahgent.weebly.com">http://susannahgent.weebly.com</a>
<b>Melvyn Ternan</b>	<a href="http://melmation.com/SHUMAWRG">http://melmation.com/SHUMAWRG</a>
<b>Andrew Robinson</b>	<a href="http://anthology.co.uk/photos_project_menu.html">http://anthology.co.uk/photos_project_menu.html</a>
<b>Mark Parkin</b>	<a href="https://vimeo.com/28810158">https://vimeo.com/28810158</a>