

Mobile Machinoeki

Walk 2

Phil Smith

www.mythogeography.com

Walk – at Haldon Forest, Devon, UK

1/ (Anoushka and Katie bring the audience over to the area opposite the Centre for Contemporary Arts and the Natural World, by the main car park for Haldon Forest. Anoushka and Katie are dressed in tabards, like shopworkers in a photo processing Shop. They test out the acoustics for the best echo and then draw an X in chalk at the spot. Beside this will be the taped off area – inside this there are a cut foxglove, and representations of an ear, eye, dog's head and shell. During this Phil, hiding in the tress, secretly takes Polaroid shots of the audience.

Katie and Anoushka read the following texts. At first it might seem as if these are their texts, but it may occur to the audience that these are messages from an, as yet, unseen writer.)

Katie: I will come back to sound later. But I want to start with space. And then we'll have the light in between. There is plenty of space for the light because there is so much space between things here. Look around you and you will see that. Because the area has been divided up. Into places that are waiting and places that are protected, into places that are used but hardly seen, and places for seeing that are mostly ignored. Maybe it's because there are spaces that are specifically set aside for nature and for art and for sport. That they need so much red and white tape.

Anoushka: I want to start with space because that is how I began to think about this place. I suppose I hoped it would tell its own story. Or make a kind of argument about something. That the place would explain itself. That the different parts would fit together. But, instead, everything comes apart here. People race down lines. Animals are divided into different species. Names become separated from bodies. A person could feel terribly lonely here. It is not somewhere I would like to be lost. For all the light, there are also the shadows.

Katie: I want to show you things. I want you to picture them in your mind. I want you to take them home with you. But you must be careful. A person could be terribly lost here. It is not somewhere I would like to be lonely. For all the signs, and the red and white tape, I wouldn't trust the surface. I suggest you be suspicious of all appearances. I suggest you assume that you are always walking on uneven ground. Listen to me.

Anoushka: I want to tell you things. I want you to picture them in your mind. I want you listen to them when you get home. But you must be careful. A person could be terribly deceived here. It is not somewhere I would like to be mistaken. For all the signs, and all the red and white tape, I wouldn't take for granted anything you might hear. I suggest you watch very carefully. I suggest you assume that you are

always crossing busy routes. Come with me.

2/ (Walk to the 'programming' gates. Anoushka and Katie stand behind the central part as if it were a counter.)

Anoushka: I want you to remember. As I want to remember. But it is all in parts. There is Prince, Pop's dog – the cat killer. Nan told me she once saw him leap up and catch a cat by its tail. The cat escaped, but left its tail behind. Prince would have had me in pieces if he hadn't been caught in my pram. I don't remember that, of course. I've been told it. But it feels like a memory. I don't want to burden you with any extra memories. I want you to see things as they are and for yourselves. So I would like you to have a camera.

(Both Katie and Anoushka hand out disposable cameras to the audience.)

Katie: I had the idea of a camera last week when I went to see the Degree Show of the Fine Art and Design students at Earl Richards Road. I didn't get the idea from any of the art. I got the idea because at the Show I met three women from the photo-developing shop in town, the one where I get my films developed. At first, I recognised only one of them. I panicked that the others were students I had been teaching. They were standing by a display of photographs of Haldon Belvedere. They were stood in a triangle.

And they were smiling. More than they had ever smiled in the shop. I would like you to take pictures of whatever you want.

Anoushka: I want you to be safe.

Katie: I want you to enjoy yourselves.

Anoushka: Follow me.

Katie: Watch what I do.

3/ (Katie and Anoushka lead the audience across the road and onto the ground of exposed flint, towards the centre.)

Katie: I want you to understand what is happening here. Because everything is changing. Going back to what it was. I want you to understand that it is a very difficult process. It involves replacing the appearance of everything. It requires tearing up the surface. Draining the colours. Because this is a false forest. A fake. A made up place. Like forests in fairy tales. Like dark forests. I want you to know that it doesn't work. That the trees can't put down proper roots, that the people can't sell the wood, that the darkness is not real darkness. I want you to be ready for the forest to be returned to what it was: to low bushes and few trees, to space and air and light, and to cattle and deer. I want you to be prepared for ripping up, and stripping away, for planning and animal management and

re-planting. I want you to be ready for the return of this place to what is real.

Anoushka: I want you know that not everything needs to be ripped up, stripped back, revealed. I think some true things can be shown almost by accident, almost casually – like the man leaning against the wings of cars and striking poses in the grounds of the hotel, one foot on the small wall of the car park. He ignores the view. I want you know about the large red owl and how it did not seem to mind being seen. And how I seemed to know when it was about to take off, because it would gather up all the air around it and launch itself as if it was opening a huge brown cape. I would feel the tension of the air even though I couldn't see it. But the hotel is not like that - the hotel is unreal and I could not understand how it behaved. The hotel is like a bird with only one wing and no body. It is an idea of a hotel. It floats on a history. It can't put down proper roots. The waiter is from Atlanta, Georgia – he is surprised that we should pay taxes on cars.

Katie: I want to take you to somewhere unreal.

4/ (Anoushka and Katie lead the audience across the cleared ground and to the stream facing the 'waterfall'.)

Katie: I wanted to bring you here, because in the forest there are places like this. Where the scale is all wrong, but the shape is correct. Or where the shape is wrong, but the scale is

correct. Or where the colours are natural, but they are the colours of unnatural things. Or where the appearance is correct, but the story is made up. Or where the shadow is correct, but what throws it is something else. I wanted to bring you here because I feel an attraction to places of the terror sublime. Where there is a sense of something overwhelming and immersing. Where I feel myself placed and scaled in the face of a massive skin of being, a universe folding itself in huge looping membranes.

Anoushka: I wanted to bring you here, because I know that there is something like this place inside of us – slightly humorous, and a little bit over-serious, somehow able to put itself together from disparate things, intermittently in danger of falling into one, unworthy, silly thing. I wanted to bring you here because it is a model of things that are far, far bigger than me. Because it is a place where there is still hope, where there is still a miniature wonder and a nagging possibility of very bad things. I brought you here because I wanted you to photograph it. Because I wanted to be photographed here with you, with this place in the background.

(Anoushka joins the audience and they turn towards Katie, who has a digital camera, they stand with their backs to the 'waterfall'. Phil then moves into position, unseen, behind the group, standing above the 'waterfall' behind the walkers.)

Katie: I hoped you would smile as if you were realising how it is that a person places himself in the world, with his feet on the ground, and among his fellow beings.

(Katie takes the photo whenever Phil is in position above the 'waterfall'.)

Katie: I would like you to see us together.

(Katie shows the audience the photo on the display on the back of the digital camera, with Phil in the background.)

Anoushka: I don't want you to think that I have tricked you. I want you to know that it is natural for a human being to want to be among his fellow creatures. It is only appearances that are to the contrary. It is only when we try to represent ourselves that divisions arise. Only when we try to identify ourselves that misunderstandings occur. I want you to come away now, to walk a more natural path. To tread a better road. Trust me.

5/ *(Anoushka and Katie lead the audience up the road to where another track turns left into the trees, turning immediately right and facing down a track in the trees.)*

Katie: I want to lead you down the road of foxgloves. I want you to sense how it falls between poison and medicine. How it disturbs

the complacent heart and calms the sensitive one. How its flowers fall like blood from the head of a saint, as he carries it back to his hermit's shed, purple towers springing up from every drop.

Anoushka: I want you each to carry a roll of film in your pocket. And imagine it is the head. Balanced on the top of vertebrae shaped like the flowers of a foxglove. I want you to understand that the art of walking is an art of balance, of maintaining a sharp consciousness on the top of a wobbling stalk of nerves and bones. I want you each to carry a piece of flint in your pocket. And imagine it is the bones. I want you to walk with care.

Katie: I want you to walk aware.

(Anoushka and Katie hand out a roll of film and a piece of flint to each person. Perhaps placing them in the audience's pockets. They then lead them down the very uneven foxglove 'road'.)

6/ *(Facing the dark trees. A few yards inside the forest Phil takes a flash photo of the audience and then disappears into the depths of the forest.)*

Anoushka: I want you to join me in the fake forest. In the forest of Little Red Riding Hood and the company of wolves. Of the X Files Pilot and the Brothers Grimm. I want you to join me in the forest of Vico and the lonely giants, who,

reproducing themselves only by accident,
maintain nothing, lying unburied and unmarked.

Katie: I want you to join me in the fraudulent forest. In the forest where the nation plants its roots. In Sherwood Forest and the Visitors Centre and the Heritage Shop. I want you to join me in the forest of Wrong Turn and that thing on the green planet from the episode of Fireball XL5 where it injects its victims with sap. I want you to join me in the forests of lonely monsters.

71 (Katie and Anoushka lead the audience into the trees, until they re-emerge where the path affords a wide view across the countryside to Exeter.)

Anoushka: I have always longed for you to see this. Because everything else seems to be stitched together temporarily. But here the churches are aligned. The hedges zip one field to the next, roads string villages and towns like pearls. Mists and plastic smudge the trees into the clouds, they rub the earth into the sun.

Katie: I wanted you to see this because everything here seems to be falling apart and into place. In the pet cemetery, close to the tower, the names do not seem appropriate: Cheese and Pickle. The ornaments are grotesque. A dog skull lies on the top of one grave. A ceramic head pokes up through the leaves. One gravestone says that the cadaver

beneath is that of a tiger.

Anoushka: I wanted you to see this. Because beneath it there is volcanic rock, and sandstone from an ancient desert and limestone that was once burnt here in hundreds of kilns, sending up baroque towers of smoke. And from all these things great waves of light sweep back and forth like coaches and postmen on foot, who would once bring mail.

Katie: And I wanted you to see this because on the mountaineers' climbing wall most of the handholds are abstract shapes, like the smooth hills and green humps you see here, but a few are like the cemetery – one shaped like an eye, another an ear, a dog's growling head, a shell. And I wanted you to walk as if you were coming to bits and your different parts could begin to appreciate difficult things, all at the same time, even though they had no physical connection at all.

Anoushka: I wanted you to see this so that in a moment you will appreciate the browns.

Katie: I wanted you to see this so that in a moment you will photograph the greens.

8/ *(Katie and Anoushka lead the audience further along the path, taking the right hand fork, where Phil was left strewn on the path numerous Polaroid images that he took of the*

audience at the start of the walk. They lead the audience – turning right – and to the road, where they catch sight of Phil by the Beauty Spot, next to the water looking towards the road, with a miniature beach scene by his feet and a large knife in his hand. They approach.)

Katie: When I was in the pet cemetery with the others I suddenly began to talk about ‘One Hour Photo’ – a movie with Robin Williams – he plays a very lonely, routine sort of man, thoughtful and conscientious, desperate for any sort of contact, admiring those with families. In the movie, the character played by Williams particularly favours one young family, imagining himself as the uncle, making copies of their photos when they bring them in for developing. One day he discovers, through the indiscreet photos brought in by a female customer, that the father is having an affair. At the same time the Williams character loses his job. He freaks out and kidnaps the father and his lover, forcing them to pose for humiliating photographs. The police arrest him, and charge him. At the end of the movie, the character asks if he can see the prints from the last reel of film that he shot and you are surprised when the police agree, expecting something awful. But when the character spreads the photographs across the table, we see that they are photos of small architectural details, quirky little breakages, absurd signage. And I realised that these were exactly the sort of photos that I would take into my photo shop to have developed.

Anoushka: And that is the end of the first part of our walk, which was all about seeing.

Katie: And this is the beginning of the second part of our walk, which is all about hearing.

(Phil wraps up and packs away the knife. Katie and Anoushka remove their tabards. Take lab coats from Phil.)

9/ *(Katie and Anoushka walk ahead, along the roadside path, to the wood clad caravan. Phil follows with the audience. Once the audience have arrived at the caravan Katie and Anoushka cross to the other side of the road, climb the gate and dress in laboratory coats and prepare cd player (ready to help anyone over the gate).*

Phil: Mister Smith often comes into the shop. He always asks for the smallest print size. He sometimes buys the largest photo albums. He never uses the self service facility. Mostly, Mister Smith places his order or collects his order and leaves. Occasionally, he will tell us a story. But he seems to feel bad after this. As if he has broken some unwritten code, taken advantage of our obligation to be polite. But there are no signs in the shop about not telling stories. Once he told us the same story twice. A student of his had become lost in the desert. Or outback. It was very easy to become lost. We

have tried to piece together the story. But sometimes it is hard to listen when you are working. In his story, the student wanders just a short way from the hostel. Or perhaps a bus. And then turns round to walk back. But they don't recognise anything. So they walk a little more. The land becomes bleaker and emptier, so they turn around and walk the other way. Emptiness and bleakness increase. The student shouts, no one replies. They turn one way, then the other. Whichever way they go is deeper into lost. Till they are in an emptiness, with one bare tree, rising like a radio mast. Climbing the tree, even though they are afraid they may fall, they see a small wooden-clad hut. They climb down and go to it. There's no one there. But the door is open and there is food on the table and the signs of hunting. They help themselves to food and fall asleep. A little while later they wake. They hear the noise of a truck and the sounds of two men shouting and laughing. The men find the student. They drive him back to his hostel. Or bus. They are happy to help. But the student in Mister Smith's story was never alone. Because there are radio waves everywhere. All you need is a receiver. Perhaps it was not a tree in the story. Perhaps it was a radio mast. Let us show you what we mean.

10/

(Phil leads the audience across the road and helps them climb the gate.)

Phil: We do not have water-cooler moments. We do not have a water-cooler. But we share stories. And while we have nothing against those who begin the day with Big Brother, we prefer to share stories intended for a more limited audience, of more expansive significance. This morning we spoke of the Tunguska events of 1908 and what it might have been that felled eighty million trees. We considered the sound wave that threw people to the ground hundreds of miles away. Sound and light, we know, are the same thing. The waves are longer in one and shorter in the other. Waves are passing through us all the time. If such a thing were to happen over the shop, the electromagnetic pulse, similar to radio waves, occurring when the nuclear gamma radiation is absorbed in the air, would damage the developing equipment. We would experience a period of atmospheric transparency, during which people could read newspapers in the night and films would develop themselves. No one has ever mentioned if any person died among the eighty million trees. And if their screams were broadcast in some way by the pulse of energy. If we could pick them up, we said, the world might not seem so empty.

(Katie and Anoushka walk ahead with the cd player, along the winding path parallel to the road. Phil leads the audience.)

11/ *(Once the radio mast is in sight. Anoushka and Katie stop.)*

Phil: Mister Smith told us that the name of the student who had become lost in the desert was Guglielmo Marconi. That he had become confused – Mister Smith that is – and that he had somehow remembered Marconi’s story as if it was that of one of his students. He explained that Marconi had been inspired by his experiences to create the technological means by which mankind need never again find it necessary to depend on the kindness of strangers. Mister Smith explained that Marconi had come here to conduct experiments. That the boy who cut the bamboo poles for his experiments could, until recently, be located. That the first wireless broadcast was made from the hills, close to the tower. That he brought the very first car to be seen here. Posing in the grounds of the big house. As it was then: an eagle owl gathering up the air around it before exploding just above the ground. He became an apologist for fascism. Millions of trees were levelled. The sound of their falling in the forest passes through us all the time. Where light is both a bullet and a wave, sound laps at the edge of us. He explained that the dead are all around, but divided from us, as if by red and white tape. And we remarked that one of the strange things about science is that every development of it has encouraged more people to believe in ghosts. He congratulated us on our cynicism. But we explained that though we have never

communicated with the dead through our developing equipment, if the radio is playing there is often a ripple in the ether and the voices from the other side are heard, interrupting instructions to taxi drivers, desperately trying to negotiate their release or surrender. Listen to them.

12/ *(Katie and Anoushka walk ahead, playing extracts from the Ghost Orchid cd of 'electronic voice phenomena'. They stop where the route turns right and change the cd to the one of broadcast secret service codes: numbers read out in changing sequences.)*

Phil: Radio is like ventriloquism. But this will be the last time Mister Smith will speak to you through us. The more original the mind of the engineer, the more likely he is to think that he can explain everything technically. States and governments are more modest. They do not pose against the wings of cars in the grounds of hotels. Boys do not carve bamboo poles for their experiments. They do not forget the names of those about who they tell their stories. Rather, they fill the airwaves with secret codes. An embassy here speaks to an embassy there. A spy at home to another abroad. Strings of code bind the world together. The opposite of conspiracies. Stitching the ear to the hedge and the dog's head to the shell. And so we can confidently hand over to them. Faceless articulations, lacking the dreadful obligations of politeness. A code speaking to a code. To them we can

confidently hand over.

13/ *(Katie and Anoushka stop where there is a puddle. Continue to play the codes cd. Phil stops by the line of flint, where he can see the surface of the distant road. He no longer reads, but talks informally to the audience.)*

I feel that I should say a few things about how we prepared this walk – but, if you’ll forgive me, I’ll continue to read from this hastily prepared simulacrum – because we would not want you to mistake informality for a solution to what this is all about.

This is why I have dispensed, for this one walk, with my usual avuncular presence and autobiographical chatter and adopted the loneliness and removal of Sy - Photo Guy.

So, if you look down there... wait, I need to explain, because when we first came here we accidentally trespassed on the private land over that way. There was a gap in the bright new blue barbed wire, just back there. We assumed therefore that what was on one side of the barbed wire was the same as what was on the other. But we were wrong. When we returned a few days later the gap through which we had passed had been sealed.

During our unintended trespass we reached a point roughly parallel with where we are now,

when Katie said that she could see a white house, Anoushka that she could see a building with a sloping roof and I could see a large white dome made of a plastic-like substance, which I thought was a laboratory.

When we came through the trees there was nothing but the road, wet from the rain.

That IS what this is about. We are not walking only in order to receive, but to plan. Of course, most of the time when we have passed the rangers, both of us working, walkers and rangers, they have almost always assumed that our predominant purpose is leisure. Perhaps only one, or two, of them, have suspected that we are hallucinating architects. Beginning to change the forest by the way we use it.

14/ *(Katie and Anoushka lead off. Phil and the audience follow. Katie and Anoushka put down the cd player. Phil picks it up, still playing. He carries it to the gates. Stops and reads to the audience. Anoushka and Katie walk on to the dark avenue of trees where they stand further along the path like the twins in The Shining.)*

At the first gates we told you the story of Prince, my Pop's dog, caught in my pram, growling.

At the very beginning we showed you the red and white tape.

Did you notice the dis-orienting post?

We showed you the forest flayed. The accidental sublime. The consciousness road. The fake forest. The experimental hills.

Did you notice Spyglass compound 3?

Different viewpoints. The surveillance. The former beauty spot. The Hills Have Eyes. The leaning tunnel.

This combination of experimental mountain, the speaking to the air like a hermit, the thin soil and the flint that prevents anything putting down deep roots – all these things conspire to make the Forest a perfect planning table, an office for hallucinating architects.

I would have liked to have shown you the signs around the tower, I would have liked to have taken you inside the pet cemetery so you could see how things become broken down here, and how things can be re-assembled according to our desires – memories rearranged, futures re-thought through, heavens in earth.

The radio masts. The compound of spies and levelled trees. It is hardly even natural yet. A place so tawdry, a utopia broken free from its dreams. I really like it very much. I feel comfortable here.

I'm going to end this section now – and this walk

– in a very personal way. Let me show you.

15/ *(Phil stops the audience just inside the avenue of trees. Katie and Anoushka are further ahead up the path as the scary ‘twins’.)*

We had a vote and we decided that the forest was a place where dreams could be sketchily manifested.

Something more than cycle tracks. Where victims are turned into Furies.

When we first came down here I saw a compound of different images from Stanley Kubrick’s movie ‘The Shining’ – a film based on a novel by Stephen King. And I wondered if we should stand here with Eyes Wide Shut and imagine our own compound of dreams.

The girls in the photo shop talk of last night’s Big Brother.

Sy – Photo Guy – dreams the evening’s TV movie.

And I see – all the time – a thin bathing of space in the light of a projector. Helping to re-imagine what these spaces might be.

Dreaming is planning. Light and sound are the same thing.

(Turn audience around.)

If you turn around and look... What movie do you see appearing behind you?

What different forest is possible?

And if we re-traced our steps, could you lay those tracings on a planning table and then re-draw them, once again? Back before 'not-even-natural-yet'?

Or should I ask you to face the future and turn back again to face the way we were going?

(Turn audience around. Katie and Anoushka have gone.)

As some sort of last hurrah for utopia and faith in the future?

Or a cheap trick?

I think it's because the forest is both – like the sound of the little boy's tricycle as he rides around the long corridors of the haunted hotel – noisy on the wooden parquet floor, almost silent on the carpet – rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!! – ssssssssss – rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! – ssssssssss... Listen for yourself as we go home what plans are in the air.

(We walk on and at the end of the path, out of the trees, we relax, Katie and Anoushka come over and we chat together with the walkers about the walk.)