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Site-Specific Theatre and Political Engagement across Space and Time: The Psychogeographic Mapping of British Petroleum in Platform's *And While London Burns*

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The broadly defined performance style known as site-specific theatre—performance that occurs outside the theatre venue in a place that is closely connected to the form and function of the performance itself—has characteristically (although not exclusively) taken one of two modes: performance that is designed for one location but that, when successful, tours to other locations, usually absorbing the different socio-historical contexts of the new locations, which allows for significant transformation; and those performances that can only ever occur at one location, usually at one time, because the combination of place and event are too closely entwined to be replicated elsewhere.¹ A third possible option is a site-specific event that remains more or less in the same geographical place, but whose context shifts significantly because of social, political, and economic circumstances surrounding it. Most audio-walks fit into this third category, whereby participants experience the walks at their leisure, outside the conventional timeframe of a performance occurring at a set time for a specific season.

This essay addresses the ways in which one particular site-specific audio-walk (which does not have a set end-date) exemplifies this third option and, in so doing, permits a

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¹For a summary of the debate over whether the "site," as in the location, must be intrinsic to the work and whether it can travel, see Fiona Wilkie, "Out of Place: The Negotiation of Space in Site-Specific Performance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Surrey, 2004).

continued recontextualization of the giant oil company British Petroleum (BP). Using a form of psychogeography, I examine the theatrical and political effects of Platform's *And While London Burns*² at different temporal intervals, and how these effects depend on social and political events outside the performance and generate sensory responses in the participant. Psychogeography, which is a more affective means of charting territory than conventional geography, is the means by which *And While London Burns* draws us in to its message of climate change—a message that has become more urgent in the years since the production's 2006 debut. The audio-walk holds the potential to intervene in more than a recreational relationship with its context; *And While London Burns*'s affective mode of participation intervenes in the participant's relationship with the city and its activities. Such an intervention renders this form of site-specificity particularly powerful by means of the self-motivated, multi-sensory engagement with the cityscape that the amalgamation of actor/participant/audience-member experiences. Participants follow instructions, but have to reprise the city (and its changes and diversions) alone and, in the process, engage mind, sense, physical movement, and a changing relationship to environment. This form renders critical thinking into physicality through both time and space—even generating a visceral response—which has more potential to stimulate us to act than likely happens in most other theatre experiences.

First, a few words on the theatrical form and on this example: *And While London Burns* is one of many audio-walks, although Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's audio-walks are perhaps the best-known examples.³ James Lingwood—from Artangel, the arts agency that commissioned Cardiff and Miller's most famous piece, *The Missing Voice* (Case Study B) (1999), which is also set in London—has commented that

Cardiff's walks paradoxically thrive on the disjuncture between what is being heard or described and what is being seen. After five years and some 20,000 other participants, I just borrowed *The Missing Voice* from Whitechapel Library again. The disjunctures have become gradually more pronounced, but the work holds together just as well. I wonder now what the experience of the work will be like in a hundred years' time.⁴

The endurance of such an artistic endeavor and the preponderance of audio-walks internationally⁵ suggest that this form of site-specificity requires further investigation.

² *And While London Burns*, directed by John Jordan and James Marriott, 17 November 2008, available at <http://www.andwhilelondonburns.com> (accessed 21 March 2011). Jordan has a record for artistic and social interventions; for example, he was responsible for setting up "Reclaim the Streets" movements during the 1990s (Anna Minton, "Down to a Fine Art," *Guardian*, 10 January 2007). He also cofounded the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (<http://www.labofii.net/>). I am indebted to one of this essay's anonymous referees for this connection. I first did the audio-walk on 17 November 2008, and a second time on 14 September 2010.

³ Cardiff explained at a panel discussion at the 2010 PSi conference in Toronto that she and Miller have decided not to pursue further audio-walks. In September 2010, I attempted to do *The Missing Voice* walk, but the staff at Whitechapel Library, where the walk originated and where participants were to collect it, professed to know nothing about it. One of the anonymous referees of this essay notes that *The Missing Voice* is now downloadable as an audio-file from the Artangel website, available at http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/1999/the_missing_voice_case_study_b (accessed 21 March 2011).

⁴ Qtd. in Peter Salvatore Petralia, "Headspace: Architectural Space in the Brain," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 20, no. 1 (2010): 96–108. This comment is taken from Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's website (http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/missing_voice.html), but it is undated. I estimate that the comment must have been made in 2004; if so, then the total of 20,000 participants has likely been well surpassed.

⁵ Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 56.

Specifically marked as a “politicised performance practice,”⁶ such audio-tours are designed, according to Chris Eaket, to change “our relationship with the city, our appreciation for it, and [change] ‘what a city is for.’”⁷ Of course, multi-temporal interpretational possibilities for *And While London Burns* are possible, because the production’s actors are deployed only once in the making of the audio-walk: their physical presence is not required after the 2006 launch/upload date. Rather than deploying actors who perform (live) the action of the narrative, the participant “becomes,” in Jen Harvie’s words, “a solo performer and is deliberately isolated in the city, inviting reflection on the ways that the city and communications technologies produce isolation and possible social atomisation or civic encounter and communication.”⁸

The narrative and function of *And While London Burns* are more prescriptive than many audio-walks in which participants become familiar with a city, or even a moment in the history of a city. Marla Carlson has written of the 2004 *Ground Zero Sonic Memorial Soundwalk* in New York City that “in the aftermath of 9/11, these walks have a special potential for productively engaging our memories. As I rewrite my experience of them, I am particularly concerned with the ways in which they rewrite my experience of the city and create a New York space for me.”⁹ *Ground Zero Sonic Memorial Soundwalk* seeks to restore memories in the wake of 9/11, whereas the political agenda of climate change in *And While London Burns* looks toward the future.

And While London Burns marks out a path in London against the backdrop not just of the city, but also of BP. Billed as an “operatic audio tour,”¹⁰ or what Ed Crooks called in his review an “innovative hybrid of guided tour, radio drama, opera and political lecture,”¹¹ *And While London Burns* blends Isa Suarez’s haunting musical score with the narrative of the unnamed main character, a trader whose partner Lucy has left him, her job as a trader, and London to escape what has been wrought by modernity. He eventually receives a postcard from Lucy from somewhere in Cornwall, suggesting that she is happy now that she is “off grid.” A second dominant voice is that of the guide, who explains in which direction to walk, reminding listeners to cross safely at the crosswalks to which she leads us, and pointing out what takes place in key buildings that we pass. Her audible footsteps pace out time and distance. She rarely uses street names, insisting that we be guided by other things,¹² especially the “carbon web”—the network of oil companies and supporting industries that, the production contends, provides a better map of London than does a city A–Z directory.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chris Eaket, “Project [murmur] and the Performativity of Space,” *Theatre Research in Canada* 29, no. 1 (2008): 44.

⁸ Harvie, *Theatre & the City*, 58.

⁹ Marla Carlson, “Ways to Walk New York after 9/11,” in *Performance and the City*, ed. D. J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 17. Sarah Gorman writes about doing *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* several days after 9/11, noting that the spatial and temporal context heightened the audio-walk’s sense of dislocation; see Gorman, “Wandering and Wondering: Following Janet Cardiff’s *Missing Voice*,” *Performance Research* 8, no. 1 (2003): 83–92, esp. 84.

¹⁰ *And While London Burns*.

¹¹ Ed Crooks, “Guided Tour That Exposes the Heart and Soul of the City,” *Financial Times*, 6 January 2007.

¹² When the trader takes over the narrative later in the piece, he provides a few more street names than the guide and his instructions are a bit easier to follow. Both voices also provide instructions based on stable landmarks, such as “turn at the cash machines” or “turn right at Café Nero.”

BP is at the center of this carbon web. This oil company, one of the largest companies of any type in the world, dominated headlines in 2010 following the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico that killed eleven workers, before spilling millions of barrels of oil into the gulf. *And While London Burns* received considerable critical acclaim in 2006 and early 2007,¹³ but its message had accrued additional resonance when I first did it in 2008, as I explore below. Its contemporary relevance in 2011 is significantly different again, as the BP connection provides yet more macabre strands to the carbon web that structures the piece. I address the shifting historical and political frame of reference that surrounds the production in three different temporal moments. While the mapping project of many site-specific productions and audio-walks attempts to describe more fully a particular location, *And While London Burns* provides more complex ways of conceiving the “mapping” of the local and the global, past and future.

And While London Burns and Psychogeography

And While London Burns establishes the actual city of London as its performance place, marking out aspects of it in detail as the participant engages with its buildings, history, and sound; the experience will inevitably vary, depending on how well a participant knows London, but nonetheless for both the lifetime resident and the newcomer the production’s map takes precedence. This map captures more than just streets in a manner that is best analyzed through a politicized version of what, in 1955, Guy Debord termed “psychogeography,” which identifies a specific aspect of geography, or geography with a particular inflection.¹⁴ Debord notes that if geography assesses “the determinant action of . . . natural forces,” then psychogeography is more associated with “the emotions and behavior of individuals.”¹⁵ Psychogeography permits the establishment of an affective geography—in other words, a map that can record personal responses; it can also chart other socio-historical features, as is the case in *And While London Burns*. Psychogeography facilitates the recording of changes through time more fluidly than do conventional maps, which are designed to fix points in space and time. This focus on a psychological interpretation of spatiality intersects with the very different mapping of London that the performance provides, and assists in my marking the shifting interpretations of the piece through time and space.

¹³ See Jonathan Brown, “The City’s a Stage in this Musical With a Message,” *Independent*, 5 December 2006; Crooks, “Guided Tour That Exposes”; Giovanna Dunmall, “London Walking: The Carbon Web That Entangles Us All,” *Plenty Magazine*, 12 February 2007, available at http://www.plentymag.com/features/2007/02/london_walking.php (accessed 21 March 2011); Christopher Hopson, “Climate Change in Your Face on London Opera Tour,” *Upstream*, 5 January 2007; Nick Kimberley, “Stage Is Set for Download Drama,” *London Evening Standard*, 11 December 2006, <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23377793-stage-is-set-for-download-drama.do> (accessed 21 March 2011); Marilyn Mason, “Review of ‘And While London Burns,’” *Independent*, 3 January 2007.

¹⁴ Guy Debord, *Situationist International Anthology*, rev. ed., trans. and ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981). The original use of the concept by Debord and the Situationists is somewhat more playful than Steve Pile has since deployed it or than I suggest how Platform uses it. One situationist method is the *dérive*, where participants “let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (“Theory of the *Dérive*,” in *ibid.*, 50). Participants in *And While London Burns* clearly experience the *dérive*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” 5.

Steve Pile outlines that psychogeography as a theoretical framework remains relevant to what he terms the city's urgent "calling out for new spatial practices"¹⁶ in the failure of existing understandings of space and spatiality. Traditional responses to spatiality, particularly in urban contexts, are proving less than effective, encouraging Peter Salvatore Petralia to note that "[i]t is no coincidence that narratives of the city, and those of a world that has become increasingly accelerated and fractured, are being explored in forms that feature dissonance as a key operating principle."¹⁷ Psychogeography, itself somewhat dissonant with conventional geography and spatial practices, provides one such means to address the accelerated, fractured, and/or dissonant models of contemporary spatial practice. Pile articulates that psychogeography is "a tactic for finding out about the relationship between experience and built form: the journey [it provokes] is a means to discover the geography of experience."¹⁸ Eaket uses psychogeography in the context of an analysis of audio-walks as a "perceptual shift of 'seeing the city otherwise'—of seeing it being historical, contingent, social, and above all discursive."¹⁹ If psychogeography's aim is, as Pile notes, to "logic-chop" "the rationally planned city, the city of boredom and oblivion,"²⁰ then the use of the carbon web as a logic-chopped map in *And While London Burns* urges a very different engagement with both London and the narrative.

There are two key components to the operation of psychogeography in this context. First, the psychogeographical world of *And While London Burns* is framed not just by the participant's relationship with the ground covered, but, crucially, by the carbon web. Rather than a comprehensive and/or conventional tour of London, the guide identifies London via this carbon web—the extensive network of petroleum companies and other agencies on which they rely—as mapped through London's buildings and firms. Rather than having historical landmarks pointed out, the guide tells the participant how various buildings, their occupants, and their functions contribute to constructing and reinforcing this large, intricate web. This form of geography extends throughout London—especially that part of the square mile that is traversed in the audio-walk—and well beyond.

The second aspect of psychogeography focuses on the more personal map that emerges from this production. It extends the psychological component of psychogeography to explore a personal psychic place through the use of the MP3 player's headphones. This "site" on the psychogeographic map comes to be as significant as those places that can be mapped on conventional maps. The aural quality of the narrative (assisted by the music) connects the thwarted love story to a psychic realm, drawing the participant further into the intrigue. This form of mapping captures our attention from the beginning, because, as I explore below, we are tethered to it and its instructions for the duration of the production.

¹⁶ Steve Pile, "'The Problem of London', or, how to explore the moods of the city," in *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Reading and Experiencing the Modern Metropolis*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 2002), 214.

¹⁷ Petralia, "Headspace," 108.

¹⁸ Pile, "Problem of London," 212.

¹⁹ Eaket, "Project [murmur]," 47.

²⁰ Pile, "Problem of London," 212.

An Alternate Map of London

"Audiences" download *And While London Burns* (www.andwhilelondonburns.com) free of charge²¹ onto an MP3 player. Written and directed by John Jordan and James Marriott, it begins whenever a participant ("audience member" seems not to be the right word) arrives at 1 Poultry Lane, near Bank tube station in London, and starts the MP3 player. Part love story gone wrong, part politics and economics lesson, the walk proceeds through London's financial district for seventy minutes and is structured by three acts, each of which is characterized by an element: fire, dust (air in this context rather than earth), and water. The history of London is prominent, even before the walk's conclusion at the Monument, Sir Christopher Wren's memorial of the 1666 Great Fire of London. It is, however, not the history of London's fire that is at the core of the walk; rather, the future structures the piece, shaped partly by the experience of the fire though primarily dominated by the threat of Thames River water that is destined to inundate the city. *And While London Burns* makes a plea for the future of the planet against the legacies of finance and industry that are explicitly linked to the excesses of modernity. Participants are encouraged to make direct connections between what they hear and see in a "real" London and beyond.

The psychogeography in *And While London Burns* is established through the carbon web that is laid over a map of the 1666 fire and marked on a rough guide to the walk, the only aid provided to participants (and that is also downloadable from the website). Participants are to supplement these intertwined maps with the conventional ones of street signs and the visual and experiential ones of historical landmarks. As Nick Kimberley noted in his review: "[i]t is not opera as we know it, but an ingenious way of reanimating this monstrous city, showing some of what lurks in its shadows."²² We are urged to listen to the announcements at Bank tube station (those recorded as part of the "opera for one" and audible through the headphones, as well as the ones that are actually being announced in real time); these recorded announcements come to take on an increasingly urgent tone as tube safety reminders give way to cautions about the drastic climate-changed future to which Londoners can look forward. The heightened state of security that is evident in the recorded messages urging calm (and that were prominent in 2006, following the July 2005 London-transport terrorist attacks) soon merges with the imminent disaster of global warming. The increasingly frantic pace of the dialogue is inevitably mirrored by the guide's quicker and quicker footsteps, the urgency becoming clear through our ears and our own inevitably quickening physical action.²³

²¹ The only cost is entry to the Monument, which was £2 in 2006. It now costs £3, following the 2008 refurbishments.

²² Kimberley, "Stage Is Set for Download Drama."

²³ Further, participants are asked to stand facing the very hot exhaust fans in this station for what feels like a very long time. This interval is long enough to hear the story of the nun who immolated herself to protest the Vietnam War, one of many such sensory parallels embedded into the walk. For Martin Welton, this scene is central to the performance's affect. Speaking about the moment when the participant is asked to stand in front of the exhaust fans at Bank tube station, he notes that "[t]he moment is *affective* not just in the effect of the warm air but also in the process of its return to the atmosphere of the city at large, itself blown through by the westerly winds which move down the Thames valley, pushed there by the flow of the Atlantic gulf-stream. The condition of air is critical to thinking critically about *And While London Burns*, not only because of the political interchange between atmospheres marked by the Bank station fans, but also because in the way it imbricates the listener in the atmosphere of the city itself. Performance perhaps, as a kind of air conditioning?" (emphasis in

Specifically, *And While London Burns* locates the “filaments” of the carbon web by concentrating on just one petroleum company, BP, the largest company on the London stock exchange; we learn that as BP “moves, in growth or decline, a whole economy swings with it.”²⁴ For example, BP accounts for 9 percent of [trade in] London’s FTSE, and 8 percent of income in British pension funds.²⁵ *And While London Burns*’s focus on BP strongly inflects the map that helps form this complex psychogeographical piece: the recruiters, advertising agencies, financiers, fund managers, insurers, and banks that contribute to and are part of the world of BP are placed in this psychogeographical map so that participants understand how these organizations are interconnected, and that such interconnections are as important as the history of London and directly contribute to its future. Further, the map leaves room for including the participant’s psychic responses, which are clearly manipulated by the narrative, structure, and form of the piece.

The firm at 1 Poultry Lane is Morley’s, the fund manager for which the trader character works. The carbon web is built on oil though it is held together by money, and the chorus’s refrain reminds participants of this by singing “more and more, more money, give us more and more”²⁶ at the point that participants are directed to walk through an institution predicated on wealth creation, the Royal Exchange.²⁷ This building, which was the center of commerce from 1565 up till 2001, is now a shopping complex for luxury brands, underscoring the wealth that the carbon web yields.²⁸ The audio-tour’s guide continues to point out buildings (some architecturally or historically spectacular, some nondescript),²⁹ mapping the vectors among them; for those participants who know London, the tour provides a markedly alternative view of familiar territory. Among the buildings visited is the Swiss Re, better known as the “Gherkin” (and sometimes known by its address, 30 St. Mary Axe), which we are directed to circumnavigate twice. Swiss Re, “the insurers of the insurers,”³⁰ the second largest such firm in the world, is where Lucy worked and where the couple had their first date.

original). While Welton argues about “temper and temperature” rather than space or psychogeography as a means of achieving affect, both of us responded to the powerful affect in this performance. See Welton, “*And While London Burns*,” paper presented at the Performance Studies international conference, Copenhagen, 22 August 2008. Dr. Welton generously shared his paper with me.

²⁴ *And While London Burns*.

²⁵ Damian Kahya, “Can I Take My Money Out of Oil?” *BBC News*, 7 June 2010, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10258508> (accessed 21 March 2011). In 2007, £1 of every £7 paid in dividends to pension funds by FTSE 100 companies came from BP (Anthony Reuben, “Why Is BP Important to the UK Economy?” *BBC News*, 10 June 2010, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10282777> [accessed 21 March 2011]).

²⁶ *And While London Burns*.

²⁷ This form of “corporate mapping” of who works with whom and what takes place where is rarely charted in such detail. Contemporary security measures suggest that the removal of such restrictions outside the psychogeographic realm of *And While London Burns* is unlikely; for instance, as I stepped into the Royal Exchange’s beautiful atrium for the first time I tried to take a photograph of the interior architecture, but was forbidden by a security guard. Clearly a result of concerns over terrorist activity, the prohibition against photography nevertheless supports the fact that the audio-walk attempts a broader, if unconventional, mapping of the world.

²⁸ See the Royal Exchange website at <http://www.theroyalexchange.com/>.

²⁹ We only rarely engaged with the actual people in buildings, one exception being a group of Deutsche Bank employees whom, through a window conveniently positioned next to a pedestrian overpass, we watched working.

³⁰ *And While London Burns*.

And While London Burns addresses a large political and social picture engagingly, layering the visual, aural, and experiential components, while crystallizing the consequences of what happens in the buildings along its path. The precision of this psychogeographical project incorporates national and international cause and effect, precisely because it is deliberately not as literal as a Google map. Its cartography does not seek to add physical place to mental construct, but rather to mark out who is responsible and what will be lost if current behavior patterns continue unabated. It aims to change participants' relationships with the city on several counts, beyond mere refamiliarization. The history of the Great Fire is the backstory to the production, and the line of the fire is even drawn on the piece's sketchy map. But the history associated with the fire is assumed, the line of the fire on the map indicated in a way that draws attention to the absence of what comes to be preeminent in this piece—a "line of water." This map has much more serious repercussions, well beyond the performance itself, made clear by the urgency prompted by the trader's narrative on both the literal streets and the psychogeographical map.

The production explores how the fire that devastated London in 1666 will be rivaled by a future event: the inundation of the Thames when the temperature rises only a few degrees more as a result of global warming. The psychogeography of the piece demonstrates that the line of fire, still carefully marked by history, needs to be kept in context in discussions of the potential of the line of water, since the resulting devastation of the flood will be as great. We experience firsthand the historical markers of the city, as well as comparing that map to one that outlines what the city will look like in the not-too-distant future, post-flood. This telling of the future is extremely profound as we walk to the flood line that the Thames water will reach, which the trader estimates to be at Lime Street. We are shown, and even traverse, land that will be underwater when the river's walls are breached. That Lime Street is at a considerable distance from the current riverbank is far more effective in demonstrating the extent of global warming's effects on London than merely seeing a flood map would be. Not only is it significantly distant from the current line of the Thames, but we also walk past buildings, businesses, and flats that will be inundated. The trader discusses his party game of showing friends a flood map to illustrate how they will be affected; his map seems only mildly effective even through his own description, in contrast to the experience of the participant who merges the geographical with the affective, which carries much more impact. Most of South London will be underwater, he explains, as we prepare to mount the Monument to witness from a different perspective the vast tracts that will be submerged and hear about the next disaster at the site of the last major urban crisis, part of what the trader calls his "cartography of catastrophe."³¹ The scope of the audio-walk grows significantly from just London's inundation. As we learn of the functions of the buildings in the area, we also discover the relationships among the firms entangled in the carbon web and the wider world, the guide suggesting that "[i]f you look closely at the fumes, you can see the geology of other countries disappearing in thin air."³² The major buildings that are mapped in *And While London Burns* are directly connected to international locations: Jordan explains that "the tour links firms in the Square Mile [of London] to overseas activities that aren't included in their

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

annual reports. It's absolutely key to know what's going on in the City because that's where decisions get made, and yet it's invisible to most people."³³ The performance's psychogeographical mapping of specific buildings in London extends from the local to the global to take in oil production in Nigeria, mine construction in Bangladesh, a West Papua pipeline, and a burned-out Siberian forest the size of Italy. The walk's psychogeographic map of London needs to accommodate the global locations and activities of these London institutions.

The psychogeographical approach succeeds, because it engages with the issues of climate change on a personal level. Brown records what Jordan and Marriott attempted to achieve with *And While London Burns*: "'We were trying to find a way that deals with the issues surrounding global warming and carbon emissions but in a way that makes you feel something for it, something other than fear that is,' said Marriott. But that is not to say the piece is not melancholic, he points out. One of the first people to experience the opera was reduced to tears. 'The point is he [the trader] doesn't give up.'"³⁴ Likewise, Jordan notes, "[w]e've had the economics and the science about climate change but no one's making art about it. . . . No one's doing stuff to help us understand it on an emotional level. Until we understand these things emotionally, we're not going to change our behaviour."³⁵ As Marriott maintains, art can play a specific role in the climate change awareness campaign: he argues that *And While London Burns* is "a way of dramatising and humanising these systems. It's over-dramatised like all opera, which is why we chose the medium."³⁶ Further, he claims that Platform "catapults the climate crisis from the cold realms of science and economics into the emotional world of culture."³⁷ One reviewer noted that the performance caused him to take personal action: "I was challenged to make the connection between my investments and their consequences."³⁸ Platform's remapping of BP attempts to prompt change by taking on climate change through the corporations most connected to it and demonstrating its palpable effects on—and in—its participants.

And While London Burns and Immersion

The second aspect of the complex Debordian psychogeography produced by *And While London Burns* pushes the audio-walk to a new dimension: as we are encouraged to walk through the city to observe its porosity,³⁹ an actual connection between this geography and the participant's psychic self comes to be established. Against this map of usually unremarked-upon sites (even by those who know the area) is a much more personal, unconventional map that comes to intersect tightly with the geographical landmarks and their international implications. It is signaled by the trader's strategies

³³ Qtd. in Fiona MacDonald, "We're All a Bit Wild at Art," *Metro*, 19 February 2007, available at <http://www.metro.co.uk/news/37973-were-all-a-bit-wild-at-art> (accessed 21 March 2011).

³⁴ Qtd. in Brown, "City's a Stage."

³⁵ Qtd. in MacDonald, "We're All a Bit Wild." A second arts organization devoted to climate change is TippingPoint (<http://www.tippingpoint.org.uk>). According to its website, TippingPoint aims to "energise[e] the creative response to climate change."

³⁶ Qtd. in Minton, "Down to a Fine Art."

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Tom Stevenson, "Investment Column: But Would the Dean Find Value in Dresdner Outlook?" *Telegraph*, 12 December 2006, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/2952272/Investment-column-But-would-the-Dean-find-value-in-Dresdner-outlook.html> (accessed 21 March 2011).

³⁹ Pile, "Problem of London."

to encourage responses from the participant: he reminds us that the effects of oil do not disappear—even if humans do—as this opera for one becomes immediately more personal. The trader exemplifies the implications of the carbon web in one person, possibly a person like me.

The much more personal form of psychogeography is elicited particularly through the use of what Petralia terms “advanced headphone and post-headphone technologies,”⁴⁰ which interiorize the performance. Petralia explores what he calls “*sound and physical presence being re-located to within a viewer’s brain*” through the use of headphones in live performance.”⁴¹ While *And While London Burns* is not a live performance in the conventional sense, Petralia’s discussion of headphone technology remains relevant for the creation of what he terms “headspace,” or “a feature of performance work that takes place largely in the head of an audience member by using a set of techniques and technologies that subvert physical space.”⁴² This interiority affects the participant quite profoundly. Just as psychogeography alters perceptions of the London that participants think they know, the use of headphones in *And While London Burns* contributes to this disorientation, where “the sounds are only audible through the headphones, thereby destabilizing any notion of *where* the performance was taking place.”⁴³ We might call this form of immersion “psycho-acoustics.”⁴⁴ In *And While London Burns*, this destabilization is a deliberate attempt to humanize the crisis of climate change that is at the core of its narrative. Not surprisingly, Jordan notes that “until we are truly moved to feel the scale of the crisis, then there is little hope our society will go beyond the cataclysmic scenario of business as usual.”⁴⁵ Platform’s aim to achieve this connection through sound is canny, since, as Bruce Smith insists, “[s]ound provides the most forceful stimulus that human beings experience, and the most evanescent.”⁴⁶

The success of this form—and especially this example—derives not just from the presence of sound itself, but how the sound is used to distort and disorient even the participant who knows the geography traversed. The distortion of sound, and its effects on the participant, also features in explorations of Cardiff’s audio-tours. Harvie discusses the distorting effect of the headphones in *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*: “[T]he sound feels three-dimensional and the listener seems to inhabit Cardiff’s space in her time. We hear her voice in our heads: ‘To experience Cardiff’s work’, writes one reviewer, ‘is to invite the artist’s voice into one’s head in a way that is eerie and intoxicating.’ . . . [Another reviewer observed that] ‘the car that came so fast behind me on Wentworth St. wasn’t actually there.’”⁴⁷ *And While London Burns* also produces

⁴⁰ Petralia, “Headspace,” 97.

⁴¹ Ibid., 96–97 (emphasis in original).

⁴² Ibid., 97 (emphasis in original). For Petralia, in headspace, “all the dimensions of architectural space are co-located into the listener’s/participant’s brain” (ibid.). The participant does, nevertheless, continue to occupy space as the performance proceeds.

⁴³ Ibid., 101 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ Brandon LaBelle notes the geographic dimensions of sound: “Acoustic space thus brings forward a process of acoustic territorialization”; see LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010), xxiii.

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Hopson, “Climate Change in Your Face.”

⁴⁶ LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories*, xv.

⁴⁷ Jen Harvie, “Being Her: Presence, Absence and Performance in the Art of Janet Cardiff and Tracy Emin,” in *Auto/biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 198.

the distortion that characterizes *The Missing Voice* for Harvie, but there is one more aspect of the immersive, psycho-acoustic effects: namely, the visceral way in which the affect of the piece comes to operate.

At first, this layer of personal psychogeographic mapping in *And While London Burns* appears to be simply a conventional existential crisis, as the trader alerts us to all the places that have meaning for him and Lucy. But this narrative is also carefully constructed to engage directly with the participant. At the beginning of the piece, the trader needs to escape the office and tells us he will “take” us to the 300 AD Temple of Mithras near his building.⁴⁸ This temple, which introduces layers of history, also signals the inevitable future of modern monuments. Now located on Queen Victoria Street, it was moved from nearby Walbrook Street shortly after its discovery in 1952, following the clearing of a World War II bombing site. The all-encompassing cult of Mithras is equated to the trader’s work in the banking industry by his exclaiming, “everything was sacrificed to the cult, everything!”⁴⁹ Such ruins are nevertheless contrasted with the contemporary world and, by implication, the unlikelihood of ruins from 2006 or 2011 being around for walkers 1,700 years hence.⁵⁰

At this sacrificial altar, the narrator reveals why he is so distracted: operating on just three hours’ sleep because of his workload, he has just discovered his low sperm count, a result of the effects of the city’s “toxic soup”⁵¹—and the petroleum industry’s contribution to it in particular. He compares himself to a polar bear, quickly introducing the global-warming theme that underscores the performance. The dust of the second act is generated by the wind tunnels created by the skyscraper, Tower 42, and, more sinisterly, carbon dust—the “fine toxic excrement” that is everywhere, including being “lodged in my lungs.”⁵² Oil has permeated more than his lungs, because it is the “black blood of our society.”⁵³ This crisis rages not just within the nameless narrator’s head, but it also rages within *our* heads, between *our* ears, and he reminds us of this fact. Petralia explores the effects of aurally enhanced performances in more detail: “Headphones become intertwined with our hearing system. . . . The closeness of the amplified sound to the body requires our hearing systems to embrace the apparatus as an extension of our natural hearing systems, to often-hypnotic effect. Indeed, as

⁴⁸ According to Heritage Key’s *The Ancient World in London*, “The Temple of Mithras, or London’s Mithraeum, is a large Roman temple, built between 307–310 AD, dedicated to Mithras, the Persian god of light and the sun (who many believe to be the actual identity of Christ). It is low-built, as it would have represented the cave in which Mithras is thought to have slain the primordial bull. Mithraism emerged as a serious rival to Christianity in the Roman Empire around the second century AD, and was a men-only cult in which those indoctrinated would be subject to fearsome initiation ceremonies.” See Heritage Key, *The Ancient World in London*, available at <http://heritage-key.com/site/temple-mithras-london> (accessed 21 March 2011).

⁴⁹ *And While London Burns*.

⁵⁰ It is hard not to think also about the fall of the Roman Empire and its connections with the narrative of contemporary catastrophe.

⁵¹ *And While London Burns*.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* Further, the dust is equated to London’s huge energy use. London uses more energy than all of Portugal or Greece; the city is also the “maker of markets and hurricanes” that result from the overuse of energy (*ibid.*).

[Michael] Akeroyd argues, 'when sounds are presented over headphones, the sounds are usually perceived as being within the head.'⁵⁴

Unlike a conventional performance, we are not watching action played out by a human who is disconnected from us; in *And While London Burns*, the performer practically merges with us, *in* us, immersively. His crisis is necessarily our crisis in a crowded psychic field, which also parallels the carbon web's infiltration of the human condition: "[o]ur bodies have become storehouses, banks, for the likes of BP."⁵⁵ Very early in the piece, the trader's physical "impairments" extend to us; we are also at risk of storing the remnants of BP, the "toxic soup," simply by virtue of inhaling the carbon dust-filled air on the audio-walk. This connection, among others, ties us to the narrative, to the trader (if not the guide), to the city, and to the crisis; it almost forces a response from us, because it affects us personally and viscerally as we come to be immersed in the piece in so many ways. Sarah Gorman writes that in *The Missing Voice*, Cardiff's withholding of a coherent narrative in the piece means that "the participant is forced to draw upon the contingencies of the surrounding environment in order to complete the narrative."⁵⁶ *And While London Burns*, on the other hand, continues to provide yet more layers, more maps, culminating in the infiltration of the participant's subjectivity.

The communalizing effects of this performance are not derived from sitting near other like-minded audience members and responding as they do (or otherwise), because this performance takes place as a form of solo consumption. Yet Martin Welton notes the paradox that *And While London Burns* is "profoundly public, despite the private act of listening."⁵⁷ Unlike the supplementing of narrative through place to achieve coherence that Gorman describes in *The Missing Voice*, *And While London Burns* encourages the participant to shadow the trader, almost to the point of "merging" with him and walking as quickly as he directs to the places of critical importance to the narrative. This merging with the trader is designed to prompt the participant to take action regarding an environmental, historical, political, and financial problem that extends well beyond the individual. The narrative is woven carefully so that the trader's sudden and urgent directive to us to "stop!" as we come to the Monument means that we listen to him when he pleads that "we have to do everything we can to avoid the tipping point at two degrees of warming."⁵⁸ The participant's engagement with an enhanced isolation combines with an extra level of engagement that becomes palpable physically.

Audio-walks obviously require particularly detailed soundscapes. For Cardiff, "[t]he virtual recorded soundscape has to mimic the real physical one in order to create a new world as a seamless combination of the two."⁵⁹ This effect is heightened in *And While London Burns* to the point that the trader's comments sometimes echo

⁵⁴ Petralia, "Headspace," 100. Petralia argues that the process continues such that "outside sounds" diminish and even "fall away." I would dispute the diminishing and falling away of outside sounds in terms of *And While London Burns*, because the real-time traffic noises and the tube announcements continue to be an integral aspect of the performance, even if they render the performance quite different for each participant. Indeed, to fail to notice these would be to risk one's safety, let alone compromise the psychogeographic layers of the performance.

⁵⁵ *And While London Burns*.

⁵⁶ Gorman, "Wandering and Wondering," 90.

⁵⁷ Welton, "And While London Burns" (paper).

⁵⁸ *And While London Burns*.

⁵⁹ Qtd. in Petralia, "Headspace," 106.

as if they are boring into our brains in an action that could be perceived to perform extreme affect. The mediatized interface of the format, which offers as part of the production the disconnection between the disembodied voice and the embodied walker, is stitched together via the city, its map, its history, our collective histories and futures, and, perhaps most importantly, the affect that is so associated with the headphones.⁶⁰

The two main maps of the narrative—the unorthodox map of the city of London and the trader's more personal one—merge at the Swiss Re Building, about two-thirds of the way through the walk, where the trader has a change of heart and decides to quit his job—not to flee like Lucy, but to try to make a difference. He also takes over the narration from the guide. The music shifts from somber to somewhat brighter, as if he sees hope in his decision. The narrative also shifts focus: the first act's fire of history has given way to modernity's carbon web in act 2, while the impending flood of the future—the focus of act 3—can yet be halted, even though the line of the flood that global warming will generate is generally kept hidden.

And While London Burns ends at the Monument, which, the trader clarifies, does not actually commemorate the fire, but rather the making of a new city—an idea reinforced in one of the final choruses: “we could build a new city, not on oil and gas but on the wind and the sun.”⁶¹ The trader and the lyrics echo talk of new possibilities, even as we witness just how much of South London will be underwater, but the satisfaction of achieving the climb of 311 steps to the top of the Monument (there is no elevator) contributes to a strange sense of hope in the participant, astutely capitalizing on the positive feeling that can result at the end of physical exertion. More importantly, it encourages the participant to contribute to a collective solution, rather than giving up in the face of the overwhelming odds against heeding the challenge of the tipping point of a two-degree temperature change. This hopeful conclusion is supported by a palpable sensory awareness: the participant takes on the same sense of calm that the once-harried trader now bears, no doubt assisted by the physical relief and satisfaction of having mounted the top step of the Monument.

Psychogeography over Time: 2008, 2010, and Beyond

The psychogeography that is produced by the carbon web and the effects of immersion has been augmented by shifting temporal events since the debut of *And While London Burns*. For participants in 2006, *And While London Burns* clearly demonstrated how “the carbon web just entangles everything.”⁶² Reviewers approved of the narrative's captivating and engrossing nature, even while acknowledging its optimism and idealism. Some, like Marilyn Mason, remarked specifically on its psychogeographic effects: “As you focus on the voices, you are separated from the lives going on around

⁶⁰ LaBelle introduces another dimension to this argument for which there is no room in this essay—namely, the role of the traversing of the sidewalk: “The sidewalk is a threshold between an interior and an exterior, between different sets of rhythms that come to orchestrate the dynamic passing of exchange each individual body instigates and remains susceptible to. It is in turn a structuring space or topography that positions the body between an inside and an outside; within the urban milieu, the sidewalk is the site for the potentiality and related problematics of social expression” (*Acoustic Territories*, 88).

⁶¹ *And While London Burns*.

⁶² *Ibid.*

you, making this an unusually isolated experience of drama. I can't decide whether this makes it more or less powerful than a shared theatrical event, but it is absorbing."⁶³

The construction of a new city may have seemed desirable and even possible in 2006, yet the psychogeographic performance requires the consideration of the continuing, and even paradoxical, effects of both (real) space and time. Participants who experienced the audio-walk in 2008 would have added to the rich context from 2006 the sociopolitical and economic realities of the day. Of course, every participant who experiences *And While London Burns* constructs a new interpretation, depending on the weather, external sounds, and the always-changing *mise en scène* of London itself. By 2008, however, the audio-walk had transformed to incorporate a more significant contemporary frame: that of the global financial crisis (GFC), through which many of the effects of the audio-tour's politicized narrative were intensified. Three main differences were notable in 2008—two directly associated with the GFC, and the third with the physical differences evident in London's landscape between 2006 and 2008.

Regarding the GFC, the guide explains the "skyscraper index": "when large buildings are finished, there's a recession or other financial collapse."⁶⁴ The 2006 narrative reminded the participant that "London's in the midst of a skyscraper frenzy,"⁶⁵ despite many of the towers being only half-occupied at the time. The collapse of large companies in 2008 meant that occupation levels were even lower in these towers. The waste that was therefore apparent in building yet more towers in the wake of so much unoccupied office space when the production was first available became only more pronounced in 2008. *And While London Burns's* uncanny prescience on this matter reinforced the point for me when I did the audio-walk post-GFC.

Further, in 2006, the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) had been associated with financing controversial projects in conjunction with BP, but in 2008, RBS (which owns NatWest Bank and, at that time, also owned ABN AMRO, among other groups)⁶⁶ was the recipient of a major government rescue package, along with Lloyds, HBOS, and Barclay's. RBS, the guide informs listeners, was in 2006 the UK's second largest bank and specifically positioned itself (internationally) as the "oil bank," with the assistance of BP.⁶⁷ In the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc., the British government agreed to prop up these banks for fear of an even greater collapse of the financial system. In the course of the next year, the government would contribute funding to the point that it currently owns 84 percent of RBS.⁶⁸ A second issue that resounded loudly in

⁶³ Mason, "Review of 'And While London Burns.'"

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Royal Bank of Scotland website, available at http://www.investors.rbs.com/shareholder_services/natwest.cfm (accessed 24 March 2011). ABN AMRO was sold in April 2010.

⁶⁷ Ibid. The guide relates that, in 2006, "Tom McKillop, chairman of RBS, sits on the board of BP while Peter Sutherland [the nonexecutive chairman of BP] sits on the board of RBS." Sir Tom McKillop stepped down from his role as chairman of the board of RBS in 2009, following disastrous financial returns in 2008 (see Jeff Randall, "Royal Bank of Scotland Chiefs to be Forced Out under Bailout Deal," *Telegraph*, 8 October 2008, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/financialcrisis/3155667/Royal-Bank-of-Scotland-chiefs-to-be-forced-out-under-bailout-deal.html> [accessed 21 March 2011]).

⁶⁸ According to World Development Movement's website, "[f]ollowing the bail-out of the Royal Bank of Scotland, taxpayers now own 84% of the bank and the Treasury has done nothing to stop RBS from investing in projects linked to human rights abuses and climate change," available at <http://www.wdm.org.uk/world-development-movement-working-towards-justice-worlds-poor> (accessed 21 March 2011).

the press in 2008 was that of banks' managerial staff receiving large bonuses, despite vast numbers of other employees losing their positions. Both factors were very much in the public domain, almost taking physical form in the shape of yet another psycho-geographical map overlaying the one generated by *And While London Burns*.

The third aspect of significant difference for participants in *And While London Burns* in 2008—that quite obviously London itself had changed—is key to understanding the potentiality of the piece over time. My experience of the audio-tour in 2008 required me to turn off the MP3 player for about ten minutes to renegotiate an access route at Tower 42 to reconnect with the walk, because some remodeling had occurred since 2006. The guide's reluctance to use street names made this somewhat difficult though certainly not impossible.⁶⁹

These three factors contributed to an intensification of the affect in this production—specifically, Platform's climate-change message. My introduction to the audio-walk in November 2008 meant that I was even more inclined to accept the urgency of the global-warming message and the breadth and strength of the carbon web, since the prediction about the “recession or other financial collapse” had been proven true in spectacular form; further, little progress (locally and internationally) in halting moves toward the tipping point of two degrees heightened the production's impact. Shortly afterward, the dismal results of the 2009 Copenhagen climate-change summit suggested that the hope of *And While London Burns* was turning to tragedy and that soon it would be too late. That we might do something is left up to us; that we must take these issues seriously is much clearer than any newspaper headlines can be. As Jordan explains: “We know the numbers, graphs, models and terrifying predictions of the climate catastrophe that faces us, but until we are truly moved to feel the scale of the crisis, then there is little hope our society will go beyond the cataclysmic scenario of business as usual.”⁷⁰ This emotional response was, if anything, increased in the time-lapse between the production's origin and my first experience of it.

Of course, the city of London changes over time; it is also a given that no theatre production is the same, even for two people attending the same performance, let alone on subsequent nights. This basic theatre truism finds a productive development in *And While London Burns*, wherein the combination of matters of time and space produce an increased level of affect and potentiality, which is partly achieved through the urgency about climate change and the tipping point, but also through the form of this audio-walk.

Against the threat of large-scale apocalypse the participant navigates through the much closer-at-hand streets of London, dealing with the short-term changes that the city imposes upon the production. Paths are blocked, whether for temporary roadwork or, as described above regarding Tower 42, longer-term modifications. The experience of the walk draws attention to very local impediments. The audio-walk's form proposes, in a knowingly naïve manner, that there will not be changes to the physical environment so that the paths that need to be traversed for *And While London Burns* can actually be walked; as such, it tempts us with a certainty of no change and a degree of passivity. The participant is told to turn left or right at particular carbon-

⁶⁹ A further limitation then was that the Monument was inaccessible, because it was being refurbished during 2008–09.

⁷⁰ Qtd. in Hopson, “Climate Change in Your Face.”

web-connected landmarks, but she also must *resist* some of these “stage directions,” because the world has continued to change outside of the narrative and audio-walk.

The audio-walk, then, requires the participant to do something that is no longer possible. While her head—and, through the audio immersion, her physical being—is filled with the implications of long-term historical change from history’s Great Fire to the impending Great Flood, the immediate experience of doing the audio-walk focuses on the short-term changes the participant must navigate to complete the walk. As I coped with the reality of these changes, I was being manipulated to accept that even as I am part of a much larger process that is happening right now, I *can* engineer change at the microcosmic level suggested by the narrative. This relationship between the very long (if ultimately finite) narrative of cataclysm and participation in the immediacy of change means that there is *more* affect after 2006, as the participant is forced to become an increasingly active agent for change management. This increased affect is reinforced by post-2006 participants inevitably knowing that climate change will have only become a more urgent issue internationally. *And While London Burns* is designed to capitalize on both current events and historicity—not just, as it may appear at first, the site-specificity of place.

If the 2008 context for *And While London Burns* achieved an extension and intensification of the politicized effects of Platform’s message, its 2010 context took on a yet-more-historicized meaning with the deaths of eleven workers on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig (operated for BP) and the environmental disaster of the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. Further, the financial networks described in *And While London Burns* were put into bleak perspective by the enormous profits available to the players in the carbon web: the former CEO of BP, Tony Hayward, received an extremely generous financial payout⁷¹ even while the personal and environmental consequences of the rig’s fire and the oil spill were still being played out. Given the size of BP and the scale of the accident, it is no wonder that such an event in the United States could at the time radically affect share prices in the FTSE. The culture of excess that was evident in 2006 took a tragic turn, compounded by an apparent abrogation of adequate safety measures. Once again, the prescience of the audio-walk reinforced the messages that were communicated aurally, physically, and psychically.

Inevitably, following the tragic deaths of eleven workers, the spill dominated media headlines.⁷² After 107 days of oil leaks, the well was capped by a “static kill” action.⁷³ In addition to the payout for Hayward, “[t]he oil giant will put aside about \$32 bil-

⁷¹ Bruce Orwall, Monica Langley, and James Herron write that “Mr. Hayward earned £1.045 million (\$1.6 million) in 2009, a tally that rose to £4 million with bonuses. Given the damage Mr. Hayward’s career has sustained—and the difficulty he may face securing another top executive post—he may be negotiating for a far higher payout than the contract calls for. Mr. Hayward is also entitled to his BP pension; as of Dec. 31, 2009, he had accrued £10.84 million in his pension account” (“Embattled BP Chief to Exit: American Robert Dudley to Succeed Tony Hayward as Head of British Oil Giant,” *Wall Street Journal*, 26 July 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704719104575388920360618064.html> [accessed 3 April 2011]).

⁷² As a measure of the interest in the oil spill, there is an extensive Wikipedia page devoted exclusively to the reaction to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater_Horizon_oil_spill (accessed 21 March 2011). Thanks to Fabien Medvecky for bringing this to my attention.

⁷³ Joel Achenbach and Steven Mufson, “‘Static Kill’ Leaves Gulf Oil Well Lifeless; Mud Clog Holds as Signs of Recovery Begin to Appear in Surrounding Waters,” *Washington Post*, 5 August 2010.

lion"⁷⁴ to cover cleanup costs. Lee Hudson Teslik and Christian Menegatti estimated US tourism losses to be "\$8.4 billion regionwide, with Louisiana and Florida taking the biggest losses," while "the insurance industry will lose \$2.5 billion," with fishing losses at "\$1.2 billion." They speculate that "the Obama administration seems inclined to use the spill to rally support for a 'clean energy' bill, which has been stalled in the Senate," but they held little hope that this bill would "radically alter U.S. oil consumption."⁷⁵ BP's motto, 'Beyond Petroleum,' with its green and yellow sunflower logo, lost much of its cachet, with previous and numerous examples of safety breaches⁷⁶ coming to light to question whether the power that the company wields in economic, environmental, and human terms is reasonable and appropriate. The contemporary events of the explosion and spill thus intensify the arguments mounted in *And While London Burns*.

The international scope of BP's activities that are outlined in *And While London Burns* have been demonstrated to be even more extensive in the wake of the oil spill: the company has also been implicated in the release of Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, the "Lockerbie bomber," from prison in Scotland to Libya in August 2009. Libya's interest in "a \$900 million deal with BP to drill deep water wells"⁷⁷ off the Libyan coast appears to have been associated with BP assisting in the negotiations between the Scottish and Libyan governments.⁷⁸ The effects of this drilling carry significant cultural, as well as environmental, risks, as Andrew Johnson notes in an article in London's *Independent*: "Plans by the energy giant BP to sink an oil well off the Libyan coast could have disastrous consequences for the region's rich heritage of coastal ancient city sites and shipwrecks—already under threat from oil tankers, coastal erosion and tourist developments—archaeologists from around the world have warned."⁷⁹

Archaeologists have noted the fragility of these sites with respect to drilling itself, even before the chance of an oil spill enters consideration.⁸⁰ Further, BP's recent activities have, for oil analyst Byron King, "showed industry and government in their respective worst light—hubris overflowing, competency lacking."⁸¹ Hayward's callous comment about "wanting his life back" in the wake of the loss of eleven workers' lives certainly did not help, nor did BP's attempts to abrogate some of the responsibility for

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lee Hudson Teslik and Christian Menegatti, "Spilling into the Economy? The Gulf Oil Disaster Is Likely to Have Little Impact on Growth," *Washington Post*, 2 July 2010.

⁷⁶ In 2005, an explosion at a BP refinery in Texas resulted in the deaths of fifteen people. While Deepwater Horizon received a safety award in 2009, its record was not completely problem-free. See Ben Casselman, Russell Gold, and Angel Gonzalez, "Blast Jolts Oil World; Gulf Rig Explodes, 11 Missing; Potential Blow to Industry," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704133804575197613591134990.html> (accessed 3 April 2011).

⁷⁷ Editorial, "BP, Lockerbie and Libya," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 July 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704682604575368861629458860.html> (accessed 3 April 2011).

⁷⁸ Steven Mufson, "Libyan Controversy Adds to BP's Woes; A Year After Bomber's Release, Outrage Revived Over Oil Exploration," *Washington Post*, 16 July 2010.

⁷⁹ Andrew Johnson, "BP Well Threatens Ancient Libyan Sites," *The Independent*, 12 September 2010, 30.

⁸⁰ Not everyone was upset with BP's Libyan project. Paul Bennett, head of mission for the Society of Libyan Studies, noted that "an opportunity to map the seabed using data collected by BP and other oil companies is being lost—along with the opportunity to ensure the wrecks aren't damaged by seismic surveying or drilling" (qtd. in *ibid.*). Clearly, the civil war currently raging in Libya (as this essay goes to press) threatens much more than just the stability of the seabed and archaeological sites.

⁸¹ Qtd. in Achenbach and Mufson, "Static Kill."

the oil spill.⁸² Details in Platform's production continued to resonate with each new revelation about the spill. As outlined above, I completed the audio-tour for a second time after the Deepwater Horizon disaster. While I gathered the facts about BP and the spill for this essay after doing the audio-walk in 2010, I inevitably brought with me (as would any participant who pays heed to current events) considerable knowledge of the disaster and its implications, in addition to the knowledge that the tipping point was drawing closer. The paradoxical relationship between the need for change at an international level and the audio-walk's manipulation of audiences to demonstrate *how* to initiate and participate in change generates an ongoing potential to encourage action.

The oil spill created for me a greater focus on the events that led to the making of *And While London Burns*. Some investors were becoming more concerned with ethical investments: "Leading economist Lord Stern recently suggested environmental risks including climate change should be factored into long-term investment decisions,"⁸³ even with the knowledge that ethical funds are known to be less likely to return high yields. The explosion at the Deepwater Horizon rig may provoke changes in behavior; indeed, several such shifts did take place in late 2010. Marriott, one of the creators of *And While London Burns*, noted, regarding BP's 2010 media presence, that "[t]hings like socially responsible investment and corporate responsibility move in jumps due to shocks to the system."⁸⁴ The risks in oil exploration and drilling were being recognized more accurately *as risks*, while Greenpeace, in conjunction with FairPensions, mounted a major campaign ("Go Beyond Oil") to encourage Britons to move their pensions from oil-based investments.⁸⁵

It is easy to target BP, perhaps even easier in the wake of the oil spill, but paradoxically the demise of a company that is the repository for so many British pensions would clearly be undesirable. Further, the explorations of BP and other oil companies continue to provide valuable research regarding the mapping of seabeds, which in turn provides useful data for various types of non-oil-based research. Nevertheless, the climate-change message and issues of the ethics of oil exploration that emerge from *And While London Burns* have implications for this and other performances. Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*, performed at the National Theatre in 2010, also condemns the absence of action on climate change; yet despite its impressive staging, this production had much less impact than the audio-walk (and certainly no affect). The effect of visceral and immersive "direct address" structures the successful psychogeography implicit in *And While London Burns*, whereas *Earthquakes in London*'s environmental staging and other attempts to engage directly with its audience failed for me.⁸⁶

⁸² "BP blaming others for the Gulf oil disaster is like Bernie Madoff blaming his accountant," according to Robert Gordon, a lawyer who represents clients against BP (qtd. in Suzanne Goldenberg, "Gulf Oil Disaster: BP Admits Missing Warning Signs Hours Before Blast," *Guardian*, 8 September 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/sep/08/deepwater-horizon-rig-bp-report> [accessed 3 April 2011]).

⁸³ Kahya, "Can I Take My Money Out of Oil?"

⁸⁴ Ibid. Marriott is identified as a member of "Platform, an NGO critical of the oil and gas industry."

⁸⁵ See Greenpeace, "Go Beyond Oil," available at www.gobeyondoil.org.

⁸⁶ This essay is not the place to discuss the reasons why I found *Earthquakes in London* to be counterproductive regarding climate change; suffice it to say that, among other factors, its denouement appeared to step back radically from the tipping point that the first part of the play constructed and pursued.

Whatever temporal frame forms the backdrop, *And While London Burns* leaves the listener with a view of the city that can be rebuilt with “hope and possibility.”⁸⁷ The performance concludes with a layered map of the city showing present, past, and future landmarks, complete with who does what and where in the city, and what the effects of these actions are around the world. It embraces politics and names names, drawing its participants into its web. The layering of different mapping projects forces us to acknowledge the implications of what happens in these buildings, here and elsewhere. This is theatre that makes us aware of events of the past as they continue to surface and transform in the present and future; it also raises the issue of the absence of ethics in many modern acts, as it marks out how the carbon web connects the regions of the world both financially and geographically. Mapping London from a different perspective in *And While London Burns* presents the opportunity not only to rethink mapping, but also the aesthetics and function of such site-specific performance, where the location remains relatively stable though the context changes over time.

An audio-walk that continues to be available for participants to experience assists in absorbing critical, cultural, and political attention when issues like the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon rig occur: such art can be reinterpreted, thereby bringing with it renewed political and cultural rigor. Indeed, the events of 2008, let alone 2010, would be well beyond what Platform could have anticipated when it launched *And While London Burns* in 2006. Pile argues for psychogeography’s efficacy in rethinking the city as planned and lived in through a form of “logic-chopping,”⁸⁸ which substantially reconstructs and resituates conventional geography. *And While London Burns* participates in such logic-chopping through its form: while it urges a very different engagement with London through the visceral and immersive nature of both narrative and headphones, it also deploys the paradox of forcing participants to perform changes and make their own decisions in spite of the potentially isolating and personal medium of the audio-walk. *And While London Burns* makes the imperative to “act” possible precisely because the audio-walk’s time and space (and the current events associated with the climate-change crisis) do not remain static.

This production only barely intrudes spatially on the city, but it delves far beneath the surface of history, politics, finance, and even notions of the self to interact with London and Londoners deeply and in a hopeful manner, thus demonstrating that “performance can help to renegotiate the urban archive, to build the city and to change it.”⁸⁹ Yet as the tipping point indicates, there is a time limit on the potentiality one can derive from this production that is well beyond the restrictions or diversions that traffic and building modification may provoke: once the inundation of the Thames affects London and the Great Flood happens, *And While London Burns* may become a historical record documenting warnings ignored.

⁸⁷ *And While London Burns*.

⁸⁸ Pile, “Problem of London,” 212.

⁸⁹ Kim Solga, D. J. Hopkins, and Shelley Orr, “Introduction: City / Text / Performance,” in *Performance and the City*, ed. D. J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6.

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