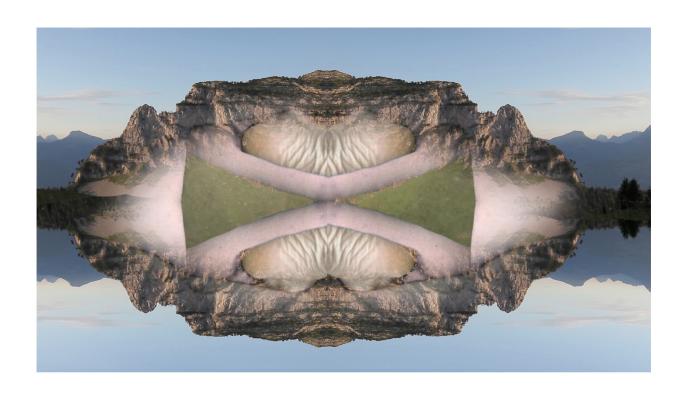# WALK OUT

An exhibition by the Walking Arts Research Group 2018

The 'Walking Arts Research Group' at Sheffield Hallam University held an exhibition at the Sheffield Institute for Arts. This is a document of that event. For more information anbout the group and the participants o9f this exhibition see the WARG website:

https://www.walkingarts.co.uk

WALK OUT

Sheffield Institute of Art at Persistence Works, 21 Brown Street, S1 2BS
30th November - 15th December 2018

PRIVATE VIEW
4pm - 6pm Thursday 29th November

An exhibition from the
Walking Arts Research Group:

Susannah Gent
Jeremy Lee
Michele Lazenby
Mark Parkin
Sonya Robinson
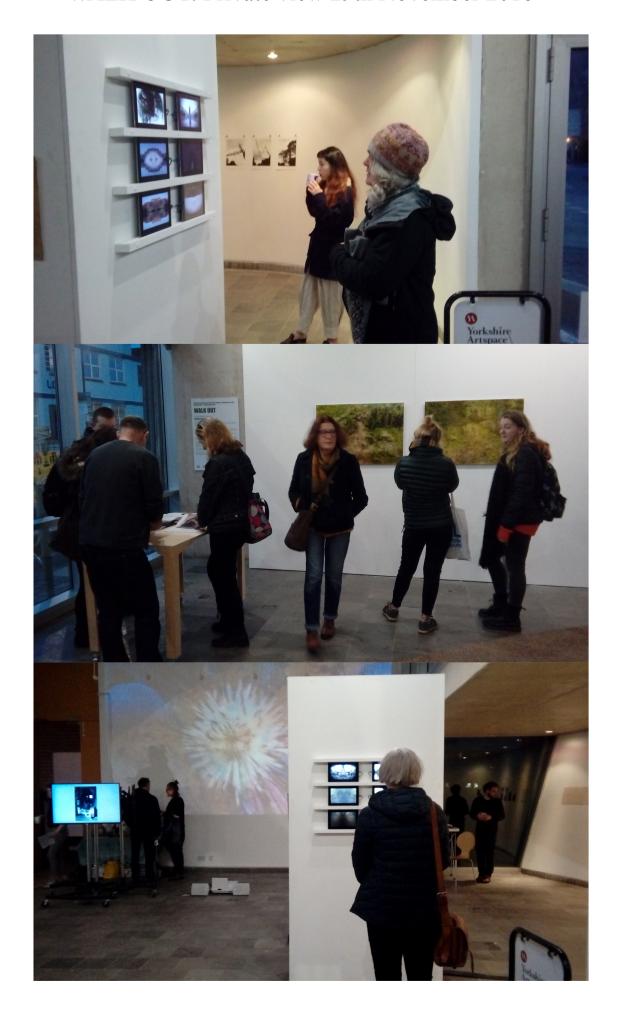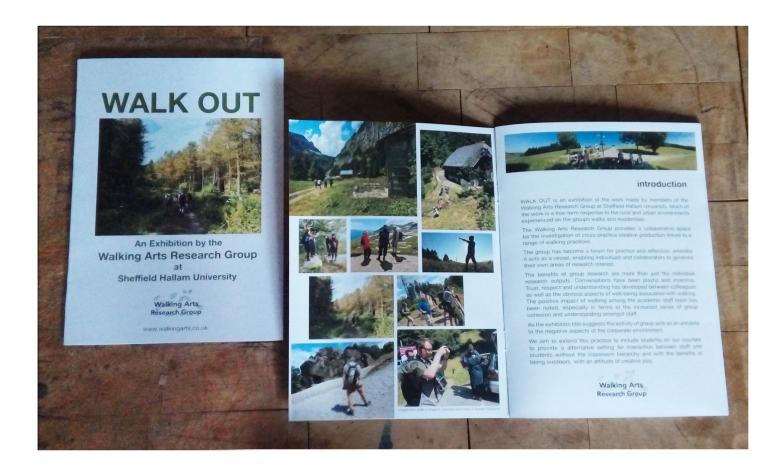Andrew Robinson
Annie Watson
Patrick Wichert
Ron Wright

The 'Walking Arts Research Group' provides a collaborative space for the investigation of cross-practice creative production linked to a range of walking practices.
The inclusive Walking Arts Research Group has become a forum for practice and reflection, where the group acts as a vessel, enabling individuals and collaborations to generate their own areas of research interest. The benefits of group research are more than just the individual research outputs. Conversations have been playful and inventive. Trust, respect and understanding has developed between colleagues as well as the obvious aspects of well-being associated with walking.

The positive impact of walking among the academic staff team has been noted, especially a sense of group cohesion. We aim to extend this practice to include students on our courses to provide a alternative setting for interaction between staff and students without the classroom hierarchy and with the benefits of being outdoors with an attitude of creative play.

Cover image and poster image by Susannah Gent

WALK OUT: Private view 29th November 2018

The gallery guide, designed by Andrew Robinson, contained information about each artist, the *Walk Out* Manifesto, and an essay by Susannah Gent

THE WALK OUT MANIFESTO

1. The production of art while walking is optional.

2. The discussion of work, including students, management, the bureaucratic system, assessment, the work environment in the pre-digital era, the effectiveness of meetings, the benefits of feedback forms, good practice and bad habits, is optional.

3. The sharing of personal information, lunch, dry socks, positive and negative outlooks is optional.

4. The acknowledgement that knowledge based occupations, including academic and research practices, require uninterrupted time for productive thought, is positively encouraged.

5. Wider participation including students, administrative staff, and management is encouraged.

6. Partial walks resulting from arriving late or departing early for reasons of childcare, workload, and nihilism are acceptable (independent travel plan required).

7. That trees can act as an antidote to the knowledge that the academic workplace in the digital era consists of a faulty, scaled-up bureaucratic system that values profit over people, may or may not be acknowledged.

8. That inspirational work requires commitment, focus, and an unpressurised environment for creativity to flourish for teacher, researcher, manager, and student may or may not be discussed.

9. The understanding that small changes can make big differences may or may not be shared.

10. Walking can be undertaken in any style or pace. Waiting for slower colleagues is compulsory with the exception of photographers using tripods and digital media producers using scanners, who may be abandoned and met later in the cafe or pub.

WALK OUT: ESSAY
Susannah Gent

In Spectres of Marx Jacques Derrida employs the metaphor of the 'visor effect' of power; to see without being seen.[1] The 'ungraspable visibility of the invisible' of the one 'who makes the law, delivers the injunction', means we must 'fall back on the voice'.[2] Derrida discusses the wider implications of this characteristic of power in relation to the question 'Wither Marxism?', the title of the conference from which the book arose, and where Derrida explores the relation of capitalism to deconstruction through the critical framework of hauntology.

Contemplating the 'ungraspable visibility of the invisible' within the workplace and the 'voice' of the other, speaking injunctions through emails, I note that Derrida's text of 1993 was the same year as the first version of Microsoft's Outlook was released.[3]

Following Marx's theory of the 'annihilation of time and space' that refers to the requirement of cheap transport and communication for capital-based production, geographer David Harvey proposed 'space-time compression' in 1989, to reflect the contemporary shrinkage of distance that brings about the 'global village'. Harvey's 'space-time compression' describes an 'imperative to reduce the circulation time of capital'.[4]

Mental health issues among academics are well documented, with work intensification and email overload seen as the major culprits but also pressures arising the difficulty of maintaining a creative practice from which teaching is informed, the lack of focused time to prepare inspirational lectures, anxiety from never-ending deadlines regardless of the speed of work, demoralisation arising from a culture of increased observation and monitoring.[5]

It has become the academic's duty to gather student feedback in the form of questions they have not written, from which action points are made that result in further administrative duties. A recurring student feedback request is for more face to face contact while the process continues to erode this practice.

The pre-digital workplace consisted of a different relation of space to time. Information with colleagues and students was shared face to face. Wall mounted timetables forced movement through space into the proximity of others. The most significant difference about this workplace was that tasks were undertaken one at a time. In the digital workplace with improved communication everything can now happen simultaneously.

It is of the utmost importance that the current generation who recall the pre-digital workplace assist in ensuring positive future practice. There have been countless improvements afforded by digital technology in the workplace, however the negatives are apparent. As we know these are part of wider economic and political issues.

The metaphor makes new ways of seeing and constructs new realities. 'Space-time compression' leads to an experience of increased gravity. The weight of intensified time fences off potential lines of creative flight. The Walking Arts Research Group aims to counter the effect of this implosion in a small but important manner. By leaving the office and heading for the wider world, the negative effects of gravity are reversed, the air lightens. Like an opened pop-up book, an unfurled work of origami, the release of vacuum packed coffee, one can think outside the (intensity of the in-) box.

The Walking Arts Research Group formed in 2014 with seed funding from the Art and Design Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University. The intention was to support and encourage research among Media Arts academic staff. While this did occur it became evident that the practice of walking together had other benefits for staff cohesion, stress reduction, sharing of good practice, and a decrease in the 'visor effect'.

Derrida's term relates to wider power-structures, however his metaphor of the unseen commander applies to email culture in which the sender of the global injunction is faceless. Granted, when walking the emails remain unanswered, however on return priority is more apparent, colleagues are closer, the tone is lightened, and time, rather than killed, is enlivened.

The Walking Arts Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University aims to meet once a month for an afternoon, or, at exceptional times of year, for a whole day to share a walk and maybe make art. In the overall time taken by this activity is small, the benefits large.

WALK OUT is an exhibition of some of the work made through engagement with the Walking Arts Research Group. Much of the work is a free-form response to the rural and urban environment.

1. Jacques Derrida, Spectres of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, New York, NY: Routledge 1994 [Spectres de Marx: L'État de la Dette, le Travail du Deuil et la Nouvelle Internationale, Paris: Galileé, 1993] p. 6.
2. Ibid.
3. Samuel Gibbs, 'How did email grow from messages between academics to a global epidemic?' The Guardian, 7/03/17 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/07/email-ray-tomlinson-history> accessed 9/10/18.
4. Aejaz Ahmad Wani and Mohd. Rafiq Wani, 'Time, Space and Capitalism', International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, vol. 2, issue 9, 2015, 306–309.
5. Academics 'face higher mental health risk than other professions', <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/academics-face-higher-mental-health-risk-than-other-professions> accessed 5/10/18.