



Bill Aitchison

Have you ever been tempted to take a guided walking tour? Visiting a new city, it is often a thing to do. Some walking guides are accredited by their local tourist bureau, but it is rather hit or miss whether what you end up going on is of any quality. Performing artist **Bill Aitchison**, while on a residency in Dubrovnik, started studying the myriad of guided walking tours offered to the throngs of tourists attracted to its historic centre. His interest has turned in to a performance he calls the “**Tour of all tours**” in which he reviews guided walking tours offered by others. Unusual - yes but popular too. Our interview takes place just an hour before he begins his artistic performance, and is recorded on a walk along the busy streets in Shoreditch..

Notes from the podcast interview by Andrew Stuck: Recorded in Shoreditch, in October 2014 and published in January 2013 on <http://www.talkingwalking.net>

Artists’ residency in Dubrovnik led Bill to observe the way tour guides navigated there way around the city, using the spaces in a an almost choreographed way. Each guide interpreting the city in their own particular way, often including some unsubtle political nuances.

Stuttgart was the first city in which Bill performed Tour of all Tours and he has since remade it in 13 cities crisscrossing from Bath and Beijing!

Bill has also devised and performs a “Getting Lost” tour of which the inaugural performance was in Birmingham. <http://www.billaitchison.co.uk/billaitchison/Waylosing.html>

Bill now lives in China, having originally been invited there by Belgian artistic collaborative, Institute of Provocation in 2009.

<http://www.artsflanders.be/news/performing-arts/theatre-in-motion-becomes-institute-for-provocation>

Bill finds the artistic frame different there, and he is forging work in public space, animating a space, involving people beyond the performance. As the streets are more used and occupied, offering a much richer public life, with the streets teeming with busy people. Making tours allows you to control when and where the performance will take place - not being dependent on scheduling of concert halls or theatres and galleries.

He studied a Foundation in Fine Art, keen as a performance artist, but in a move against how the artistic market works, he changed to study a ‘can’t really make you mind up’ triple honours degree in Fine art, Psychology, and Theatre Studies at the University of Wolverhampton. Then an MA in performing Studies becoming quite a theoretician and it wasn’t until he studied mime that he found his metier. He undertook a practices based PhD in performative mime, of which two strong elements are standing and walking.

Bill blogs creative review of Tours on his blog:

http://www.billaitchison.co.uk/billaitchison/The_Tour_of_All_Tours.html

Bill has been coming to and performing in Shoreditch and Brick Lane for more than 20 years and recalls what a ‘dump’ it was, but how the changes and gentrification of the area has actually detracted from its richness and ‘grittiness’.

Tour of all Tours follows a route that travels from warehouse conversion hipster shabbiness to sheer glass concrete towers of the City via regenerated Spitalfields, in which Bill explores the spaces as well as talking about the myriad of tours, from gastro and urban art, to Ripper yarns. Living away from London as he now does, he feels he is a tourist too.



Walks Bill recommends:

1. the 6 or 7 mile National Trust Bath Skyline tour which can be self-guided around the hills and slopes that surround the city, but he recommends a guided tour at sunset
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bath-skyline/>
2. a tour to the Great Wall in Beijing, often a hilarious shopping extravaganza experience definitely one to take with an open mind, not wallet.
<http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attractions-g294212-Activities-Beijing.html>



What Bill has been doing since our interview

“Recently, I’ve been getting more serious about getting lost and I’ll be leading a three-day non-stop **Way-Losing tour** this summer which should be fun as we will have no idea where we will stay along the route. This will really take it to the next level and might feel somewhat like being on the run. I’ve also refined some of the tools of getting lost and have a better idea now exactly why it is appealing.

I’m still exiled in China due to the British visa laws and I am now living in the former capital Nanjing. I’ve been working on an audio tour here that places Adam Smith’s 1776 treatise *The Wealth of Nations* onto some of the city centre’s shopping malls and this collage is proving to be suitably slippery and interesting. The pertinence of his description of a capitalist economy to a nominatively socialist one plus the insertion of instructions like, “turn left” and, “hard right” is appealing.

I’ve been doing quite a bit of work in Hong Kong too, both teaching how to make walks and also creating a new one of my own called *Hyper-Heritage*. This has gone into the city’s film history and sought to see how the cinematic city has shaped the actual city. It has been a great learning experience for me. I’m also working on some new concepts for walking performances that will highlight the art in everyday life, I’m keeping these under wraps for now till I can try them out in practice!”

Updated 11/2/18