

# INTERVIEW WITH *Tim Wright*

by **Jeremy Hight**, online via email correspondence, June 2011

Re-Drawing Boundaries, Leonardo Electronic Almanac New Media Exhibition

Curator: Jeremy Hight

Senior Curators: Lanfranco Aceti and Christiane Paul

## Who and/or what were some of your early influences? What/who have been later influences?

Early influences in new media? I guess the Voyager titles cast a long shadow ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyager\\_Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyager_Company)). So did Douglas Adams. All my colleagues at Noho Digital in the mid 1990s were pretty inspirational especially the team that made MindGym (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Focus-Multimedia-Ltd-Mind-Gym/dp/B00004UCQR>). In terms of general media/literature, I guess like a lot of people I'd watched and admired "Twin Peaks". And Douglas Coupland was \*hot\*.

More recently, I continue my love affair with W.G Sebald (I contributed to this: <http://www.culturalinquiry.org/sebald.html>). It's hard not to be influenced by Blast Theory when you're in my line of work (<http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/index.php>). I was given a serious crash course in the history of hypertext and new media writing and introduced to a whole heap of talented people by Sue Thomas when we both worked at the trAce Online Writing

Centre (<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/index.cfm>). More recently I had my head turned by the Richard Long retrospective at Tate Britain, I'm beginning to think Simon Pope is a genius (<http://www.axisweb.org/ofSARF.aspx?SELECTIONID=16099>) and I'm still completely besotted with anything to do with William Blake.

### **What are you working on right now?**

Mainly I'm developing my ideas about 'bookmapping' and talking books for a walk generally. I'm developing a walk around Lambeth, south London, about William Blake that includes a downloadable PDF booklet, qr codes, geolocated media, user upload of audio and pics, perhaps some site specific theatre/performance and on-the-fly publishing/printing of co-created 'books'.

In the autumn I want to sail, cycle and walk the whole of 'Riddle of the Sands' reading out the book as I go and using blog, wiki and mobile media technology to map out the story in real time and allow an online audience and/or fellow travellers to really unpack the novel, discuss it, remix it and explore the relationship between a work of literature and the landscape/time of year/events that inspired it. Again this might lead to the publishing/printing of a co-created 'book'.

### **What has led your writing and design interests to maps and spaces?**

Mobile & 'pocketable' technology make it possible to 'create' (well, log) on the move in a way you just couldn't in the past and net connectivity in remote places is also possible and affordable. It's just so much easier to get out and about, shoot, write and publish.

I'm at an age too where my back doesn't like me to be sitting in a darkened room for hours staring at a computer making digital stuff. I guess this is part of a general trend I sense of people wanting to somehow get back to the real world after years of screen life –and finding ways to unite their digital interests & work with the things that happen & matter IRL.

### **Did Oldton become a communal narrative of a space? A collective false memory yet one that makes it a "place" as there are artifacts and recollections?**

Well yes and no. I collected all the audience contributions in a blog –each with its individual URL and then created a map and a 'walking tour' using the contributions as the source material. So the space and the narrative were still –I'd like to think– my creation to which other people could attach (and detach) their memories/thoughts/souvenirs. In terms of 'false' memory, I think most people who played with me in Oldton were drawing on very real memories as I was about my dad. they just chose to locate them in a fictional place. But that didn't make them 'false' - in a funny way it made them more 'true'?

### **What is becoming possible in terms of narratives tracing or retracing spaces in the real and fictive worlds?**

This is a very exciting time. GPS tech is fab and very affordable now. I bought my wrist-based location device for £50 from a sports warehouse. It last for two days and maps not just my location, but my altitude, my speed etc and allows me to export data straight to a GoogleMap. all kinds of Android and iphone apps are coming out that do cool stuff with mapping and geolocation (mostly for cyclists and runners I think at the mo). I think what OpenStreetMap (<http://www.openstreetmap.org>) are up to is also pretty awesome.

And look what Googlemaps did for me. I mapped out *Kidnapped* at home using Flickr pics and wiki material from home –and then I had a route to follow, an adventure to go on! (<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=204498775921724292017.00044c2c451cc33e06941&ll=56.37894,-4.724121&spn=1.271402,3.56781&z=9>)

### **What titles are prescribed to you in relation to your work? Do they come to encompass different fields and even schools within fields of art and writing? Is this in certain ways problematic?**

Yes this is a problem. I use the term digital writer a lot since it's usefully general covering the more traditional work I do like developing digital TV show ideas, writing radio plays (for listening to via DAB, the Web, red button) working with brand agencies on social media campaigns. When I'm actually working in-house as a consultant or as some kind of exec producer I do get called 'crossplatform producer' quite often –or 'annoying interactive guy'. Just recently people in the UK have started to get excited with the idea of 'transmedia' and that word is starting to get used in job titles. I rarely btw get called an artist (a half-artist maybe). Generally I'm happy with some kind of 'writer' title since in the end my background and training is really about words and literature and story.

trying to challenge myself to get out in the world and talk to people face to face, allow the work to go wherever it will, allow it to be a bit shit, even and then try and make sense of it or 'script' it either on the fly or with simple authored outputs after the fact. So the physical fact of being out and about and of communing with people in real time, of being alive right here right now, is becoming important to me. So since *Oldton* the work has become more networked, a bit more 'live', a bit more social, less 'authored' and 'formatted' –and I sense I'm trying to disappear into the landscape– just leaves ways and means for others to think about writing and creating and sharing rather than desperately wanting them to see *me* and *my* work.

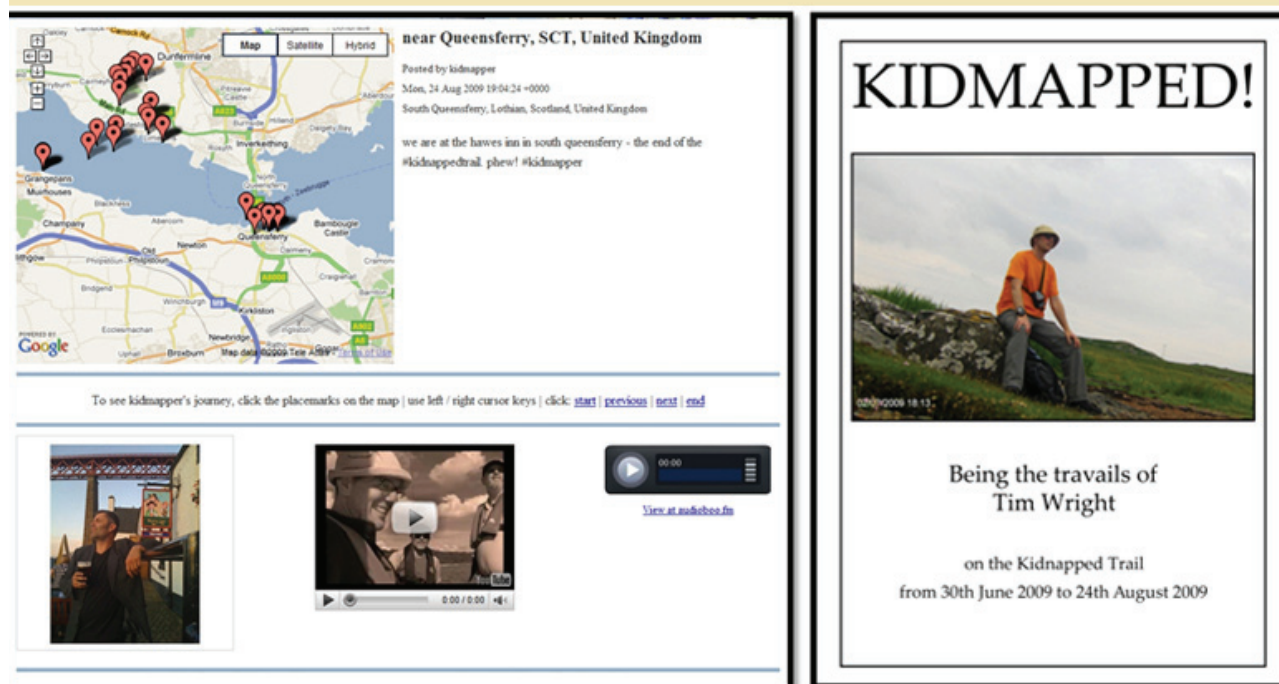
### **What of measure and play appeals to you in your narrative works?**

Well they both feature don't they? I don't feel comfortable being entirely lumped in with the data and games crowd that are very much in vogue in the UK right now. Measurement just seems to be part and parcel of digital production if you ask me. If I want to share a navigable story space I probably need to measure it out in some way, show people how many 'clicks' it is from A to B, where an 'end' or an 'exit' might be etc

Play is more problematic. I am much more inspired by meaningless play, playground games, the theatre of adhoc conversation than I am by any kind of rules-based game arena. In fact in recent years, I equate playfulness with meaninglessness, shapelessness –refusing to organise work into a format or something that can be simply consumed or 'understood', something that keeps changing shape so you never quite know what it is. Is that play?

### **What progression or progressions have you seen in your work in relation to space and other aspects of earlier works like *Oldton*?**

Well, with *Oldton* I could still hide behind my screen, hide in my room and retain control over the work in some way. I think in the last few years I've been



Kidmapped, 2009, Tim Wright. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

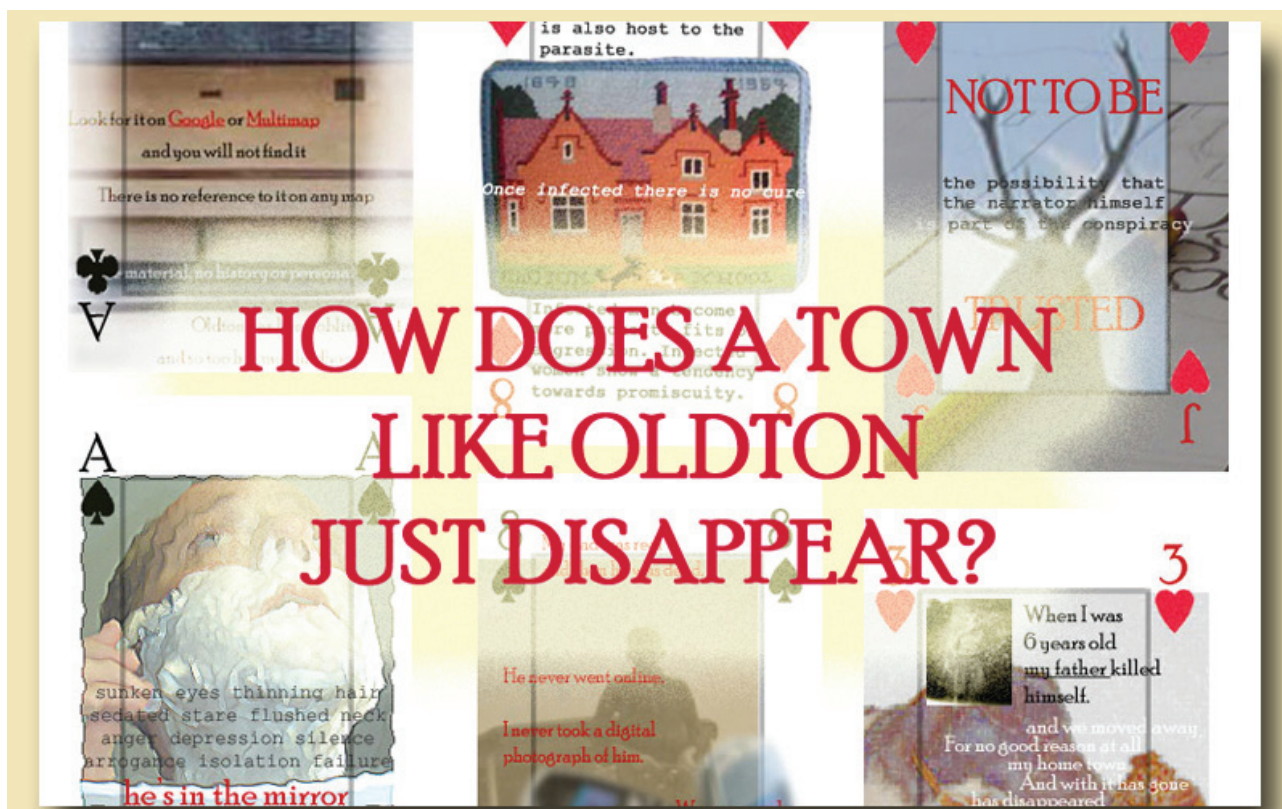
## Kidmapped

'Kidnapped' is a fantastically exciting book. The story of David Balfour running for his life across the Highlands, sometimes accompanied by tough and rebellious Alan, sometimes pursued by the English army, seemed so visceral and exciting to me that I wanted to try it for myself.

So that is exactly what I am doing.

Perhaps there's something you'd like me to do or think about whilst I'm walking. Perhaps you'd like me to visit specific sites and film them for you. Or better still, perhaps you'd like to come out here and join me for a walk, add your own responses to being on the Kidnapped Trail and have an adventure of your very own.

Kidmapped video link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg3hrVLf7WY&list=PL272279007EEFA15E&context=C294adADOEgsToPDskLNSgX6kHC KT1\\_W3YBovocy](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg3hrVLf7WY&list=PL272279007EEFA15E&context=C294adADOEgsToPDskLNSgX6kHC KT1_W3YBovocy)



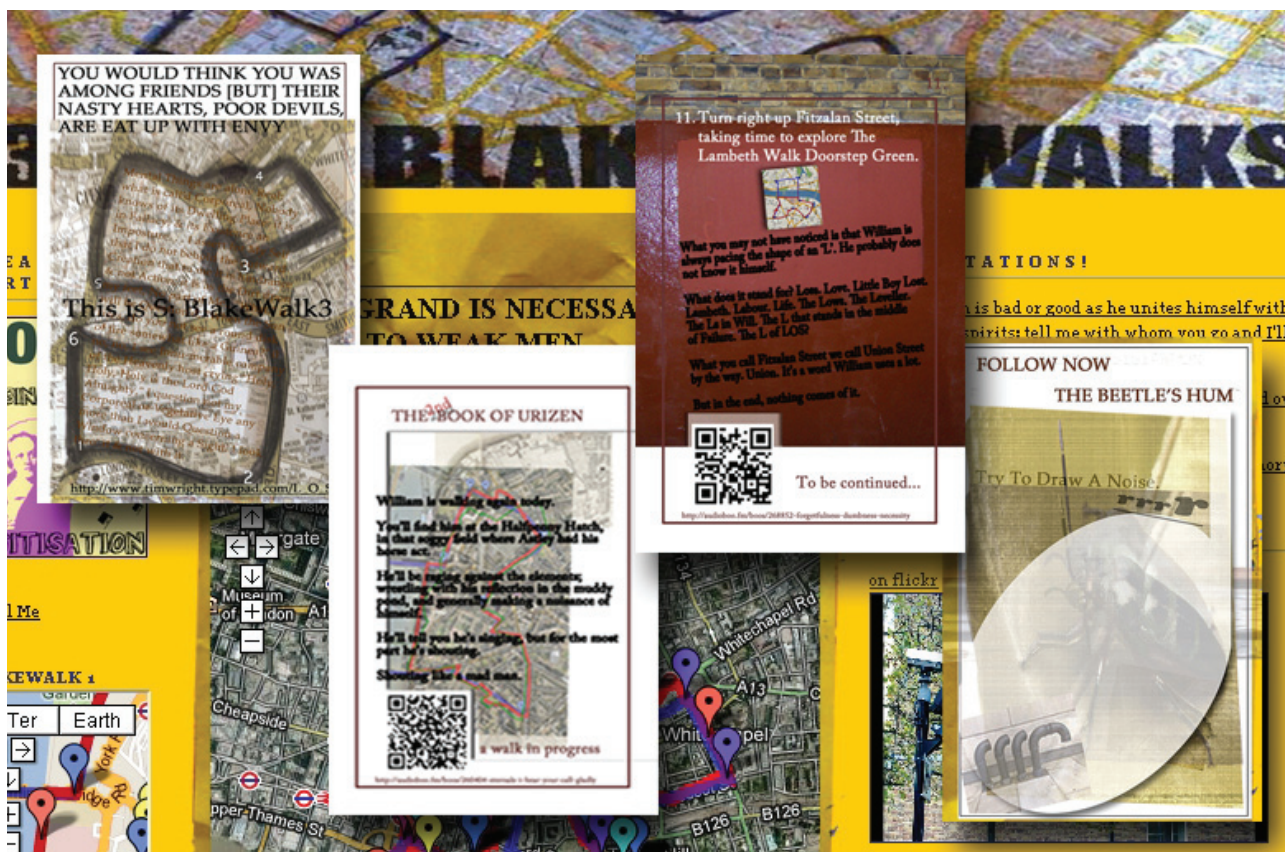
In Search of Oldton, 2004, Tim Wright. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

### In Search of Oldton

When I was six years old, my father killed himself and we had to leave the old town where I was very happy. Now I go back to look for it, it isn't there. That was how I started my 90% true story about the lost town of Oldton. From these simple beginnings, more and more contributions and creative responses came in from people who claimed to remember Oldton –texts, photos, drawings, sound files, video clips– all manner of personal insights, memories, jokes, comments, additions and revisions. In the absence of any authentic and original digital assets with which to talk about my past, it seemed natural –indeed necessary– to make assets up, or, better still repurpose assets sent into me by other people who shared my narrative interests and concerns. This preoccupation with all things lost came very much from a sense of being disconnected from vast chunks of my own pre-digital past.

Some chunks –such as my relationship with my father– were lost in a very literal sense, since he died over 15 years ago, and his ashes scattered at sea. A map of Oldton emerged. I could work out where the church might be, where my own home had been, where Matthews Lane was. And so on





Blakewalk, 2009, Tim Wright. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

## Blake Walks

There were Five of Us. Each with our own Reasons for wanting to spend a bright, crisp autumn afternoon drifting across London, talking as we did about Romantic Poetry, Careers, Easily Overlooked Architecture, Pies, Scopic Regimes –oh, and William Blake. Of course!

I

have Mapped all of the Media I generated during this *BlakeWalk* (see *map above*) –and left the map open to Collaboration should others wish to pin their Materials to it. All of this Media is also freely available to you to take on a BlakeWalk of your own, including this record of our Conversations for you to play on your phone or mp3 player.

Blakewalk video link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOAKOjA-c\\_U&list=PL272279007EEFA15E&context=C294adADOEgsToPDskLNSgX6kHC KT1\\_W3YBovocy](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOAKOjA-c_U&list=PL272279007EEFA15E&context=C294adADOEgsToPDskLNSgX6kHC KT1_W3YBovocy)

## Artist's Statement

During the last few years I've been less interested in the exclusively online screen-based interactive work I was known for in the past. I'm trying more and more to challenge myself to get out in the world and talk to people face to face, allowing the work to go wherever it will, allow it to be a bit shapeless and meaningless, even. The physical fact of being out and about and of communing with people in real time, of being alive right here right now, is becoming important to me. Since 'In Search of Oldton', the work has become more distributed, a bit more 'live', a bit more social, less 'authored' and 'formatted' - and I sense as a writer I might be trying to disappear into the landscape, whilst always leaving ways and means for others to think about writing and creating and sharing in my place.

## Bio

Tim Wright is a digital writer, a crossplatform producer and a director of XPT Ltd. His writing credits include two BAFTA-winning interactive projects: the comedy self help disk 'Mind Gym' and web & email drama 'Online Caroline'. He also co-developed, devised and scripted the BAFTA nominated science-learning Web drama 'Planet Jemma' and BAFTA nominated online holiday farce 'Mount Kristos'. In 2004/5, he created the popular collaborative web fiction and Sony Award-nominated BBC Radio 4 play 'In Search of Oldton', pioneering the use of user generated content within a narrative fiction format. He has continued his relationship with Radio 4 contributing to a radical overhaul of Today's website, whilst writing two further Afternoon Plays that involve online audience participation ('Say What You Want To Hear'). The web element of the popular public art project 'The Telectroscope' was co-developed and written by Tim. He was the lead writer of the RSC's recent Twitter drama 'Such Tweet Sorrow' –and in 2009 he completed 'Kidmapped!', an experiment in literary blogumentary, involving a 240-mile walk across Scotland and the use of geolocation and mobile media tools. ■