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Walking & talking: making strange encounters within the familiar

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines the creation and testing of a practice-as-research methodology that investigates whether introducing playful interventions into a habitual cultural practice – in this case, walking – can heighten an individual's openness to encountering the strange and unfamiliar, with a view to increasing receptivity for communication and dialogue. The focus on physical movement as trigger for intellectual, psychological or emotional change distinguishes this research from other, more conceptual, ideational strategies. The methodology emerges from a performing arts practice centred around notions of play and draws on contemporary geographical discourses concerned with relationships to place as well as on qualitative methods of inquiry. Creating a series of experiments and interventions to look anew at our surroundings, the research locates itself within practices that are concerned with critically exploring the cultural geographies of cities through performative and affectual approaches. The article examines some of the empirical findings of the research specifically related to negotiating encounters across difference presented by the other articles in this issue.

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PALABRAS CLAVE
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Marcher et parler : faire d'étranges rencontres au sein du familier

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait un compte rendu de la création et du test de la méthodologie « practice-as-research* » qui cherche à savoir si l'introduction d'interventions ludiques au sein d'une pratique culturelle habituelle – dans ce cas, marcher – peut intensifier l'ouverture de la personne à la rencontre de l'étrange et du non-familier, dans le but d'augmenter la réceptivité à la communication et au dialogue. L'accent sur le mouvement physique comme déclencheur de changement intellectuel, psychologique ou émotionnel différencie cette recherche d'autres stratégies plus conceptuelles et idéelles. La méthodologie tient son origine de pratiques de performances des arts centrées autour de notions de jeu et s'inspire de discours géographiques contemporains qui s'intéressent aux relations au lieu ainsi qu'aux méthodes qualitatives d'investigation. En créant

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une série d'expériences et d'interventions pour un nouveau regard sur ce qui nous entoure, la recherche se situe au sein de pratiques qui s'intéressent à l'exploration critique des géographies culturelles des villes à travers des approches performatives et affectives. Cet article examine certains des résultats empiriques de la recherche, spécifiquement liés à la négociation des rencontres avec la différence, présentée dans les autres articles de ce numéro.
*Note de la traductrice : Ce terme exprime la notion de lien direct entre la recherche et la pratique. La pratique fait partie intégrante du processus de recherche et des résultats obtenus.

Caminando y hablando: realizando encuentros extraños dentro de lo familiar

RESUMEN
En este artículo se describe la creación y el ensayo de una metodología de investigación práctica que investiga si la introducción de intervenciones lúdicas en una práctica cultural habitual — en este caso, el caminar — puede aumentar la apertura de un individuo para encontrarse con lo extraño y desconocido, con miras al aumento de la receptividad para la comunicación y el diálogo. El enfoque en el movimiento físico como disparador para el cambio intelectual, psicológico o emocional distingue a esta investigación de otras estrategias más ideacionales y conceptuales. La metodología surge de una práctica de artes escénicas en torno a nociones de juego y se basa en los discursos geográficos contemporáneos que se ocupan de las relaciones de colocar, así como en métodos cualitativos de investigación. Creando una serie de experimentos e intervenciones para volver a examinar nuestro entorno, la investigación se localiza en sí dentro de las prácticas que se ocupan de explorar críticamente las geografías culturales de las ciudades a través de enfoques performativos y afectivos. El artículo examina algunos de los hallazgos empíricos de la investigación relacionada específicamente con la negociación de los encuentros través de las diferencias presentadas por otros artículos de este número.

Introduction

> I didn't manage to talk to anybody … I really have to be in a particular mood … OK, trying to make eye contact with people is a bit difficult, most people are trying to avoid eye contact, I smile at an old man, he frowns back at me, how about the Dairy Crest delivery driver? How would I start the conversation, something about milk, cows, methane carbon emissions, non-organic hormone-filled milk crates, excess mucus, he's getting in his truck now and driving away … ah that lady with the pink jumper looks friendly, the first woman I've seen, oh she's walking very fast, looks like she's in a hurry. I'm getting towards St Anne's Church and I haven't spoken to anyone yet, no, not the angry man on the phone. There's a magpie, hello Mr Magpie, an old grumpy man telling off a young man, both in ties, I smile at them, the young man smiles back, the old grumpy man tells me to keep walking to the end of the road, I frown at him … (Eve, October 2008, post)[1]

This quote demonstrates complex feelings involved in an attempt to engage another human being, a stranger, in conversation on a familiar walk in the speaker's neighbourhood. A participant in a research project, *A Walk around the Block*, she was carrying out an instruction which required her to 'Talk to at least one person while you're out on your route'. This participatory, practice-led

arts research explored whether playful interventions within habitual walks could provoke new understandings of the ways in which we perceive and relate to our neighbourhood and neighbours and, amongst other things, potentially create opportunities for unfamiliar encounters and encounters with strangers leading to a heightened openness to communication and dialogue.

The methodology intended to investigate a disposition (Ravaisson, 2008) to changing habits and assumptions through the use of play and the creation of 'moments' (Lefebvre, 1992, 2004) of surprise (Casey, 2008) and wonder(Bennett, 2001) by employing interruptions in an everyday routine (Felski, 2009). The framework for the research would be a walk which is often overlooked as being mundane, boring even: an everyday walk with a purpose that many people all over the world take every day, for example, to the shops, the pub, school, work or the bus stop. This walk would become a laboratory for experimentation with opportunities for a range of different encounters and a means to create a conduit between intuitive, embodied micro and vernacular knowledges of the quotidian habits of our life worlds and what Dorothy Smith calls 'the ruling apparatus' of more macro intellectually based formal knowledges (1988, p. 8). This conduit or liminal space of not-knowing, is a time-space for questioning, curiosity and openness to hitherto unencountered feelings, thoughts and provocations which might lead to increased communication and dialogue with others, unknown or not.

Background to the research

With hindsight I see three key issues that influenced the direction and process of my research: first, living in council housing estates in Peckham, London through the 1980s and trying to understand the genocides in the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990s had led me to question notions of neighbourhood cohesion, understanding and tolerance. Second, moving to South-eastern Michigan USA in 1992 I began to explore the neighbourhoods of a Detroit devastated, fragmented and abandoned through a unique confluence of industrial decline, racism and urban planning (or lack of it), walking along *desire lines*[2] which criss-crossed its vacant lots and abandoned gardens. Third, my theatre training was underpinned by the work and practices of martial arts instructor and movement practitioner Moshe Feldenkrais, which proposes that an individual's attitudes and habitual patterns are changed through movement interventions. With these three under pinnings, my arts practice and research, already rooted in social engagement began to problematize concepts of neighbourliness, of methods of communication and dialogue and of learning through play and improvised movement interventions.

Working from and with these three strands in 2003, my theatre company in Detroit (Walk & Squawk) devised the *Walking Project,* a cultural exchange involving communities and artists in Michigan, USA, and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Amongst a variety of artworks, public participatory walks in both countries over 3 years prompted me to consider how aesthetic strategies within everyday walks, as opposed to dedicated and guided walks, might develop the potential for 'ethical encounters' (Finn, 1996, p. 153) across a variety of differences (race, gender, age, class, ability) between individuals (and subsequently groups) in local neighbourhoods that might lead to changes in perceptions and attitudes to others.

From the *Walking Project*, and the substantial and growing body of literature and discourse on walking that was becoming apparent (Amato, 2004; Anderson, 2004; Augoyard, 1979/2007; Brennan, 1999; Careri, 2002; Coverley, 2006; Cresswell, 2006; Engewicht, 2005; Lefebvre, 2004; Mels, 2004; Pope, 2000; Rothemann, 2000; Seamon, 1976; Sinclair, 1997; Solnit, 2000; Tester, 1994; Wellmann, 1991; Whitehead, 2006; Whybrow, 2005; Wrights & Sites, 2006a,

2006b), I began to formulate research questions which emerged as a thesis: Can intentional acts of walking be a different, and more embodied way of engaging people in dialogue in order to provoke changes in attitudes and assumptions? Can playful interventions within a habitual walking routine provoke changes in attitudes to and perceptions of neighbourhood and neighbours that might lead to increased communication and dialogue? The core of the research asked whether a resistance to the unfamiliar and the strange might be shifted or 'nudged' through physical interruptions of habitual patterns to create an openness to increased communication and dialogue between people of diverse backgrounds and life worlds, through a communal process of walking together. The initial research focused on working with individuals rather than groups, firstly because of the complex logistics of organizing groups of people to walk for a number of times together; and secondly, having experienced the shifting and meandering dynamics of group walks, I felt that before group walks could become useful in increasing communication and dialogue, individuals should already have had an experience of the potential of playful walking interventions to heighten their awareness and openness.

The 'meshwork' of the methodology

Emerging from a performing arts practice centred around notions of play, the methodology draws on contemporary geographical discourses concerning relationships to place, conceptual arts practices and qualitative methods of inquiry. It locates itself within practices that are concerned with critically exploring the cultural geographies of cities through performative and affectual approaches, offering unique, yet simultaneously everyday opportunities for encountering the strange and stranger within familiar neighbourhoods. Such approaches might lead to increased communication and understandings between individuals and groups from different and diverse backgrounds, cultures and political perspectives. The uniqueness of the methodology resides in the use of playful, physical interruptions within an everyday embodied practice, in this case walking, to create a receptivity to change in an individual's assumptions and attitudes. The findings suggest that such experiments might be applied to other areas of our life world, in order to provoke changes in habits – in areas such as commuter travel and environmental and ecological issues and conflict resolution.

Drawing on the empirical work of David Seamon (1976), Francis Augoyard (2007), Situationist practices, clowning techniques and contemporary theorists and practitioners concerned with the city, the methodology is one of mixed approaches, assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992) or bricolage (Barrett & Bolt, 2007). Similar to Lefebvre's notion of a 'meshwork' (in Ingold, 2011, p. xii), the methodology suggests a weaving of different strands of theory and practice intersecting in new ways to create new meanings.

This article outlines the methodology in more detail and examines some of the empirical findings of the research specifically related to negotiating encounters across difference presented by the other articles in this issue. It examines the potential opportunities as well as the complexities of such a methodology that might encourage making stranger encounters part of a regular practice of local walking. The first section of the article contextualizes the research within the field. This is followed by a section that outlines a number of distinguishing elements of the research. A third section discusses the specific focus of this article within

the special issue followed by a fourth section outlining the devising of the project. This is followed by the final section documenting and analysing participant findings. To begin with, the use of walking as research methodology also requires some discussion.

Walking as research methodology

'Whether inspired by radical pedestrianism, the French Situationists, green politics or a concern with historical heritage (and sometimes by a combination of the lot) alternative walks, trails and guided tours are proliferating all over London' (Cohen, 2014) and arguably the Western world. Walking appears to hold a particular attraction for an increasing number of contemporary artists and researchers, perhaps because it can generate a particular state of consciousness: '… where you can be both alert to all that happens in your peripheral vision and hearing, and yet totally lost in your thought process'. (Alys in Cuauhtémoc, Ferguson, & Fisher, 2007, p. 31). Clearly evident since Richard Long created his iconic photograph 'A Line made by Walking' (1967), artists have sought to employ walking interventions as means of exploring relationships to the landscape and environment as well as relationships to each other. Increasingly, walking as performance and as art has become a core practice through which many geographers as well as artists map and investigate these relationships from a wide range of perspectives: historical, literary, emotional and socio-political. Arguably, the unique and perhaps most compelling aspect about these contemporary walking practices is that '[t]he walk is simultaneously the material out of which to produce art and the modus operandi of the artistic transaction' (Alys in Cuauhtémoc et al., 2007, p. 31). They seek ways to introduce awkward, inefficient and at times confusing moments and interventions into our everyday, with the specific purpose of urging us to engage more actively and reflexively with ourselves, others and our environment. They also demonstrate an increasing desire to explore and make meaning from our relationships to space and place through personal archaeologies, images and feelings. Such investigations prioritise vernacular and personal responses over more formal approaches (Smith, 1988), creating a more socially engaged and arguably democratic approach to understandings of our contemporary life world.

The literature on intentional walking and walking as art and performance reveals an ever-expanding field of strategies, methodologies, interventions and activities, both historical and contemporary. From writings by walking philosophers and thinkers such as Thoreau (1862/2011) and Rousseau (1776–1778/2011) to Debord (1955) accounts of 1950s Paris Situationist *drifts*, from Rebecca Solnit (2000) eloquent overview of walking to the visual impact of Hamish Fulton's art walks to the poetry of John Wylie's (2005) walks along coastal paths, from Dee Heddon and Cathy Turner's (2010) vital contribution on women who walk to Ian Sinclair's (1997) dark London walks to Phil Smith's (Smith, 2010, 2014) imaginatively provocative accounts of interventions and performances, walking has become a touchstone and point of departure for a myriad of explorations and academic research. A superficial Internet search for walking artists and walking projects and a look at the Walk21 website also demonstrates the exponential increase in these in the last 10 years (http://walk21vienna.com/visionaries/submitted-projects). Whether it is the image of Francis Alys pushing a block of ice along the street (Cuauhtémoc et al., 2007), or being part of a higgledy-piggeldy group of people on a pristine Zurich pavement, excitedly poring over tiny pieces of 'contemporary relics' (Smith, 2012, p. 21) during a Mis-Guide with Wrights & Sites;[3] reading fish and chip stories on a designer piece of chip paper during one of walk walk walk's East London

excursions;[4] conducting walking interviews (Evans & Jones, 2011); participatory listening of an audio *drift* in Kilmahew, Scotland (Gallagher, 2015);or reading aloud a poem read whilst carrying a rucksack of books from one side of Belgium to another (Heddon & Myers, 2014) the work of many contemporary artists and geographers seeks to investigate a wide variety of concerns employing walking as a mode of inquiry. The works of these particular artists and practitioners have in common an attention to detail, imagination, improvisation and a sense of experimentation in form and content. They also have a preoccupation with the mundane and the everyday (though they might not use those specific terms and might differ in their definitions of it). A key element of the work is that it is participatory and collaborative, introducing a wide range of individuals and groups to an examination of relationships to the surroundings woven through walking. Thus, in many practices attentions have begun to focus increasingly on the participant as actor, who creates her/his own interventions within specific walks (Gallagher, 2015; Myers, 2011b). Ingold (2011) argues that, '[t]hrough walking … landscapes are woven into life, and lives are woven into the landscape', (p. 47). Walkers can thus be seen as co-creators of their surroundings – and in the case of this particular research, of their own neighbourhoods. It is amongst these arguably more ethnographic-focused activities that this research locates itself, with recruited participants being asked to carry out interventions followed by discussion of their responses in Post-Walk interviews.

Distinctiveness of the research approach

Making a conscious attempt to do what Alistair Bonnett (1998) describes as 'making good on the avant-garde's historic promise to abolish art; to do away with the role of creative specialist and begin the task of deciphering the already existing creative realms of daily life' (p. 25), my research is distinct from these other practices in a number of ways which are discussed in the next section: first, it takes the everyday walk as a research space or laboratory; second, the approach to interruptions or interventions is based on movement inspired by the practice of Moshe Feldenkrais and by creative play and improvisation; third, participants in the research became collaborators and authors of their interventions;

First, a participant's daily or regular walk, seen as an aesthetic practice, is used as a laboratory for experimentation (Ramsden, 2014). My question concerned the possibility of developing a disposition (Ravaisson, 2008) to a new habit of noticing, and reflecting on that noticing within the rhythm of everyday lives. If so, might this encourage a deeper engagement with our neighbourhoods and those living within it, potentially engaging strangers in dialogue? Whether guided, such as a foraging walk around Brandon Hill as part of the 2015 Bristol Walking Festival, or a regular literary walk with the Museum of Walking in a London neighbourhood, or mis-guided as conducted by Wrights & Sites, or a Situationist *dérive* as proposed by Brennan, such special walks already bring the attention to the fore. The uniqueness of a regular walk to the shops, the bus stop, school or work is that, being a familiar practice, it almost invariably enables the walker to switch off from paying attention. This offers a discrete time-space within which to experiment and move back and forth from paying attention to switching off, potentially creating a conduit, a liminal space of moving-between, and making connections between small nuanced changes in the everyday and more abstract conceptual thought processes. Many of the participants in the research

stated that this switching off of attention was exactly what draws them to walk regularly rather than to drive or cycle to a destination. For Dee,

> the thing about walking is that you don't have to have that state of consciousness of looking around you and seeing what the traffic's doing and, or, I suppose you have to be conscious of people but it's much more relaxing. (Dee, April 2009, pre)

Claire observed: 'I think I tend to sort of just … you know … leave the house and don't really … sort of realise where I am until I'm halfway along St Marks Road' (Claire, November 2008, post).

Introducing interruptions into this walk in the form of performative interventions would necessitate a repeated yet temporary bringing to the surface of a more focused attention in order to provoke questioning and reflection on provocations emerging from the walk and the interruption. Thus, the methodology seeks not only to refocus our perceptions but also through these interruptions to trouble the sensibilities with which we perceive.

A second distinguishing element lies in the approach to interruption. The notion of interruption initially derived not, as in the case of many walking arts and research methodologies, from the theorizings of Henri Lefebvre or Situationist practices, but from the movement work of Moshe Feldenkrais (1987). Feldenkrais' method[5] is founded on the premise that through movement and use of attention, dramatic shifts in our perception of ourselves and how we are perceived appear to be possible. He linked a change in movement to a change in attitude, maintaining that at any one time human activities occur on four levels – thinking (intellectual), feeling (emotional), sensing (taking in and processing) and moving (physiognomy). A shift in any of these has potential to produce shifts in the whole self, thereby bringing about change. He suggests that movement is the most immediate and concrete level on which to enact changes. The approach here is predicated on creating a rupture, or interruption, in the physical habits of the body, creating corresponding interruptions in our habitual patterns of attitude and perception. It is these shifts in perception on which the research focuses. A physical approach to interruptions allows for a more embodied and layered reception of, and response to, changes on all levels of our being (Feldenkrais, 1987; Ingold, 2011). Building on the potential connections between the physical, spiritual, intellectual and sensual levels of being, and drawing subsequently on theorizings by Lefebvre (1992, 1994, 1996, 2004), and Situationist practices, I introduced this movement-inflected concept of interruptions within the parameters of the everyday walk. The everyday nature of this walk offers the walker the opportunity of 'performing and enacting the tissue of everyday life differently' (Cooper, 2014, p. 9) creating shifts in perception and assumptions on different levels (Feldenkrais, 1987).

Drawing additionally on play (Huizinga, 1970), clowning techniques and Situationist *détournement* (Debord, 1955; Smith, 2014), I created performative interventions which asked participants to follow cues or 'enticements' (Brennan, 1999, p. 28) within the parameters of the everyday walk, to act outside expected or normative patterns of behaviour. Engaging in 'playful-constructive behavior' (Debord & Wolman, 1956/1981, p. 10) required participants to experience and create their own unique readings of their neighbourhoods. In doing so, through a *détournement*, or turning on its head, of the experience of their surroundings, research participants might experience moments of surprise. Edward Casey (2008) maintains that the element of surprise can occur when we are in a place of being between one edge and another, as a result of interruption, for example. He calls this *thinking at the edge,* in a space of *not-knowing*; Deleuze & Guattari have termed it *becoming otherwise*

(1992, pp. 256–341). Surprise, argues Casey, is 'quietly revolutionary', because it can 'unsettle us without literally upsetting us', existing between the 'innocuous and the shocking' and perhaps between the edges of the familiar and the unfamiliar (2008, p. 100). It is not a midway point between extremes – which would mean that it would quickly become *un*-surprising – rather it moves between extremes, unpredictably, inconsistently. Furthermore, Casey finds most intriguing the surprise that emerges from interrupting the familiar or the *un*surprising. The gentle 'jolt' of the interruption causes a surprise within a familiar everyday pattern and enables us to consider this familiarity from an unfamiliar or 'estranged' perspective. Methodologically, this also relates to Brennan's approach, maintaining that: 'Within a domain of action involving the body … a process of thought might be inaugurated where our habitual and automated preconceptions break down' (1999, p. 23). This 'estrangement' engenders a feeling of uncertainty, an affective space of not-knowing that can elicit critical reflection, leading to further action on different levels as proposed by Feldenkrais (1987). The research asked participants to interrupt their everyday walk, to make the familiar strange, consciously creating opportunities for the occurrence of small surprises, which might change perceptions of their neighbourhood, potentially encouraging a receptivity to encountering the unfamiliar. The everyday walk acts as 'a gateway to a hyper-reality, where encounters are made possible … and the researcher [in this case the participants] allows him- or herself to be inhabited by a place in order to later step back and grasp a fuller picture' (Gatta & Palumbo, 2014, p. 251). Thus, an intentional walk in a familiar neighbourhood enables a walker to look anew or estranged at their surroundings as they themselves become a familiar stranger, which Goodman and Paulos (2004) suggest, provides a kind of buffer zone between our own personal space of the familiar walk, for example, and that of the complete stranger.

A third element that distinguishes this practice is that the participants themselves are the researchers and artists. Much of the discourse of contemporary art practices since the 1960s has revolved around the notion of interaction, dialogue and exchange. Gablik (1991) argues that by placing value on relationships as opposed to the artwork or object, the creative process becomes more important than the product, indicating a shift towards a 'more participatory, socially interactive framework for art' (p. 7). Grant Kester extends this notion of social interaction and values artwork that creatively facilitates dialogue and exchange, where 'conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself'. In this kind of work, 'dialogical projects … unfold through a process of performative interaction' (2004, pp. 8–10). Authorship, then, becomes participatory and collaborative. By thinking differently and acting in unexpected ways, the volunteer walker is instrumental in her/his own practice of intentional, improvisational walking.

Encountering the strange and stranger within the rhythm of an everyday walk

Seamon (1976), anticipating Ingold (2000), maintains that encounter is 'any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand' (p. 99). He suggests that there is a continuum of attentiveness of 'encounters tending toward mergence, and on the other encounters tending toward separateness' (1976, p. 101). The encountering we do on a daily, albeit, semi-aware level on a regular walk that brings us into contact with neighbours, animals and objects, locates and contextualizes us in a familiar lifeworld, in 'a fluid environmental dynamic that allows for temporal give and take' (Seamon, 2007, p. 4). The (slow) pace of

walking is crucial for the methodology because it allows time-space for noticing such encounters. Ingold (2000) proposes that this experience 'amounts to a kind of sensory participation, a coupling of the movement of one's own awareness to the movement of aspects of the world' (p. 99). Thus, the everyday walk creates and is created by, the walker through a process of continuous encountering.

Such everyday walks create a corporeal infrastructure for the way neighbourhoods, communities and even countries function (Jacobs, 1961), creating a network of interwoven threads of daily routines that form an invisible and intangible safety net in a world that at times appears chaotic and fragmented. These threads create what Seamon (1976), inspired by Jane Jacobs, calls a *place ballet*. The choreography of such *place ballets*, in which each inhabitant plays out her/his familiar routine, creates the vibe or rhythm of a neighbourhood. Each individual's walk creates a refrain (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992) made up of accustomed gestures, pauses, deviations, crossings, signs and signals and the rhythms between all of these. There is a rhythm not only to the pace but also to the placement and timing of each gesture that occurs. It creates a refrain so familiar that the destination can be reached without noticing. The steady pace of our walk sets up a familiar rhythm and we are at home in its embodied habitualness. Eilis makes the connection between body and mind: 'There's just something about putting one foot in front of the other, stretching out, and my feet and my mind seem to link and it just seems to kind of unwind and you get into a rhythm …' (Eilis, July 2008, pre). Participants were conscious of not paying much attention to their everyday walk in itself which, as mentioned earlier in this article, provided a unique and discrete time-space for a switching on and off of attention. Julie observed: 'I tune out a bit when I walk normally', (Julie, June 2008, pre), and Laura is very conscious of the fact that her 'walk'[6] 'because of pure habit often it's a mechanical thing that I'm not really conscious of. I was on autopilot perhaps and … my mind is more engaged in more internalised things'. (Laura, June 2008, post). Nicola observed: 'It does become very ingrained'. (Nicola, July 2008, pre).

The accustomed rhythm of the walk, the passing of familiar landmarks, encountering the same people at the same time of day, all contribute to the proceeding of a well-oiled routine, which becomes a refrain that is open to improvisation as in a change of pace, crossing the road in a slightly different place, looking up on hearing a loud noise. This familiarity in improvisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992) might be developed to include a potential openness to strange encounters.

Within this familiar landscape, Jacobs (1961) argues that there are strangers but she does not suggest that they are to be feared, merely that all people on the streets need to feel safe. Richard Sennett (1977) suggests that in order to create a sense of the local (or safe) we ghettoize ourselves and in doing so revert to what Solnit (2006) observes as a 'retreat of citizens to private life and private space, screened from solidarity with strangers and increasingly afraid or even unable to imagine acting in public' (p. 6). Sennett argues that we do not grow through encountering the familiar, but 'only by the processes of encountering the unknown' (1977, p. 295). Arguing for an ethical encounter with others, which is 'an alliance, a neighbouring that was not chosen' (1996, p. 154), Finn suggests that we might establish 'relationships with others in "excess" of (beyond and between) the categories that render us knowable and/or already known (as representations of the Same, the familiar)' (1996, p. 155), such as woman, child, man; Muslim, atheist, Jew; straight, lesbian, transgender; upper, middle, lower class; black, white, of colour. Such encounters though not necessarily bringing us to closer agreement or consensus, may lead us to a closer understanding of one another,

perhaps beyond these categories that divide us. This understanding develops Sennett's notion of encountering the unfamiliar, suggesting that we move beyond fear of 'strangerhood' (1977, p. 295). In carrying out interruptions in their everyday walks, participants in the research were required to encounter familiar surroundings more attentively and in unfamiliar ways – for example, by focusing on one colour, by wearing a different pair of shoes, by walking backwards, by going out of their way to talk to someone. Such encounters were intended to provoke questioning and reflection, developing a receptivity to encountering the unfamiliar and potentially leading to communication and dialogue with others and possibly a change in perceptions, habits and assumptions.

Devising the research project

I devised the participatory practice-as-research project so that a number of things could occur. Firstly, that participants might feel a sense of freedom to experiment and play within the everyday. Secondly, as a result of this experimentation, that participants might consciously experience a sense of the connection between a so-called everyday cognitive state and moments of wonder (Bennett, 2001), or astonishment (Ingold, 2011). Thirdly, I intended to create opportunities for the creation of a 'not-knowing' affective space as a temporary, ludic time-space, where thinking beyond, questioning and communication might be possible. By the term 'not-knowing' time-space, I am suggesting a state of mind and/or feeling which might emerge firstly, from a process of paying increased attention and/or secondly from the jolt of an interruption, provoking questioning or eliciting responses that differ from habitual patterns (Bennett, 2001).

The interruptions, enacted on a corporeal level, create shifts in perception on other levels (Feldenkrais, 1987). The process of this enactment creates an affective space of not-knowing, which holds the potential to encourage a receptivity to stranger encounters through active listening and noticing, drawing on Finn's (1996) notion of the ethical encounter and Fiumara's (1995) philosophy of active listening. By interrupting the everyday we can develop a facility of moving from what we might term a being-in-everyday state to a state of heightened awareness. Inhabiting the liminal space of moving-between, we have the potential to make connections between small nuanced changes in the everyday and wider more abstract processes of understanding, triggered by changes in physical movement.

A walk around the block: the practice part of the research

Although participants did not have to have a walk that they walked literally every day, it had to be one that they made at least once a week. In this way it was a habitual, repeated walk that they were familiar with, where the potential to switch off was likely. Because the research meant committing unpaid time and energy, it was not possible to recruit a large number of volunteer walkers. Twenty-five participants were recruited mostly amongst interested residents in my Bristol neighbourhood of Easton, and included colleagues and friends. I recruited five additional volunteers in Ann Arbor, South-east Michigan partly because the research was inspired by my living in Detroit and Ann Arbor. Both Ann Arbor and Bristol are walkable cities, with amenities and facilities – commercial, educational and leisure – within walking

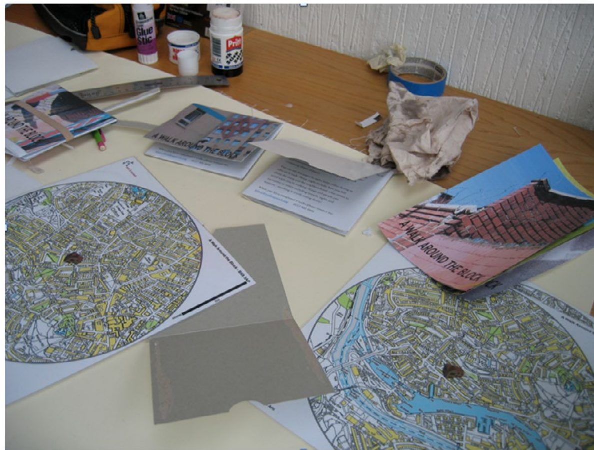

Figure 1. Making the Walker's Pack.

Figure 2. Covers on the Walkers' Packs.

distances of most neighbourhoods. Most of the volunteers are women (20% are men); apart from one, all identify as white; most consider themselves middle-class, even if not coming from a middle-class background; one identifies as disabled; all have completed secondary school and most find writing a comfortable medium to work with, though a number of them felt they were terrible spellers. Four of the volunteers did not complete the walks. In most cases participants walk their walk more than once a week and some, like Eileen make their walk more than once a day.[7] There was no required length for the walk, which varied from 50 m to between two and three miles. I asked participants to interrupt and reflect on their everyday walk four times, within one month. Once I started to recruit volunteers I began making individual Walker's Packs (see Figures 1–4).

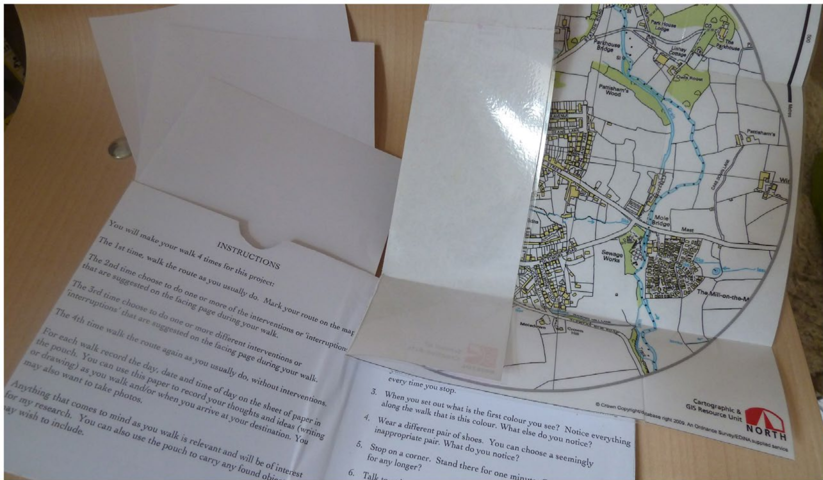

Figure 3. Walker's Pack with folded, laminated map and notepaper.

Figure 4. Walker's Pack with pencil.

The Walker's Pack

Combining functionality and aesthetics, I made a Walker's Pack that could be carried easily and looked attractive. This was made from two cardboard compact disc cases, taped together. I cut one cover open and into it pasted a folded, laminated map of a square mile centred around the participant walker's home – the map showed enough detail of their neighbourhood, yet enabled most participants to draw on it the whole of their everyday route. I kept the other cover whole to hold four pieces of notepaper, one for each walk. Once opened out, the pack has written instructions and interruptions for the walks. Folded up, the pack is secured with a rubber band, which holds a pencil to write or draw with and a pen to mark

Figure 5. A participant's everyday walk traced on their map.

the route on the map (Figure 5). The cover photograph, taken on my own research walks, was chosen with some care for each participant.

I chose Cochin as the font for the inner text because it appears formal yet airy, spacious yet serious. The size of the pack was also important: it should be easy to carry in a pocket or small bag but not too fiddly to deal with whilst walking. Some participants found there was not enough paper for notes, some found the pieces too small. In one or two cases the map came unstuck. Nevertheless, in general the pack worked as a tool and also as an artwork in its own right. Participants expressed delight in using it.

The Interruptions

Participants could choose from eight interruptions listed in the Walker's Pack*:*

(1) Walk back home using exactly the same route, crossing the road in the same places, walking along the same side of the pavement … as precisely as you can. What do you notice?
(2) Pause in your walk every 5 min. Take a look around – what do you see? Close your eyes. What do you hear? Record something every time you stop.
(3) *When you set out what is the first colour you see? Notice everything along the walk that is this colour. What else do you notice?*

(4) *Wear a different pair of shoes. You can choose a seemingly inappropriate pair. What do you notice?*
(5) *Stop on a corner. Stand there for one minute. Can you stand there for any longer?*
(6) *Talk to at least one person while you're out on your route.*
(7) *Walk backwards along your route. What do you notice?*
(8) How slowly can you walk? What happens when you walk this slowly?

They could carry out one or more interruptions and no one chose to do the same one twice. In designing these I was conscious of creating a broad choice that would enable participants to be more or less playful depending on their level of comfort, bearing in mind that most of the participants were not used to improvising or to being seen doing out-of-the-ordinary actions in public space. Nevertheless, I wanted to provide the opportunity for risk-taking and experimentation. Therefore, the interruptions ranged from what I considered to be low-risk – such as choosing a colour to follow – to more high-risk – such as wearing a possibly inappropriate pair of shoes, or standing on a corner for a minute or longer. I believed participants in my research would be comfortable to play for several reasons: first, I used the words 'experiment' and 'research' as opposed to 'games' or 'improvisation' which I felt took away any overt pressure to perform or play; second, participants at that stage had no part in creating the interruptions. They were, in a sense, obliged to carry them out (or not), thus they could blame me for inventing potentially foolish suggestions; third, participants knew there was a limit to how many interruptions they had to do and that the project was finite.

Participants could make written notes, drawings, take photos (Figure 6) and collect objects (Figures 7 and 8) as part of their investigations. Of the 30 participants who completed the walks, all made written notes, seven took photos and several made drawings and collected small objects during their walks. I conducted interviews following Jean Francois Augoyard (2007) notion that 'the interviewing method is completely directive: in a sense that a duty

Figure 6. Participants' notes and photos.

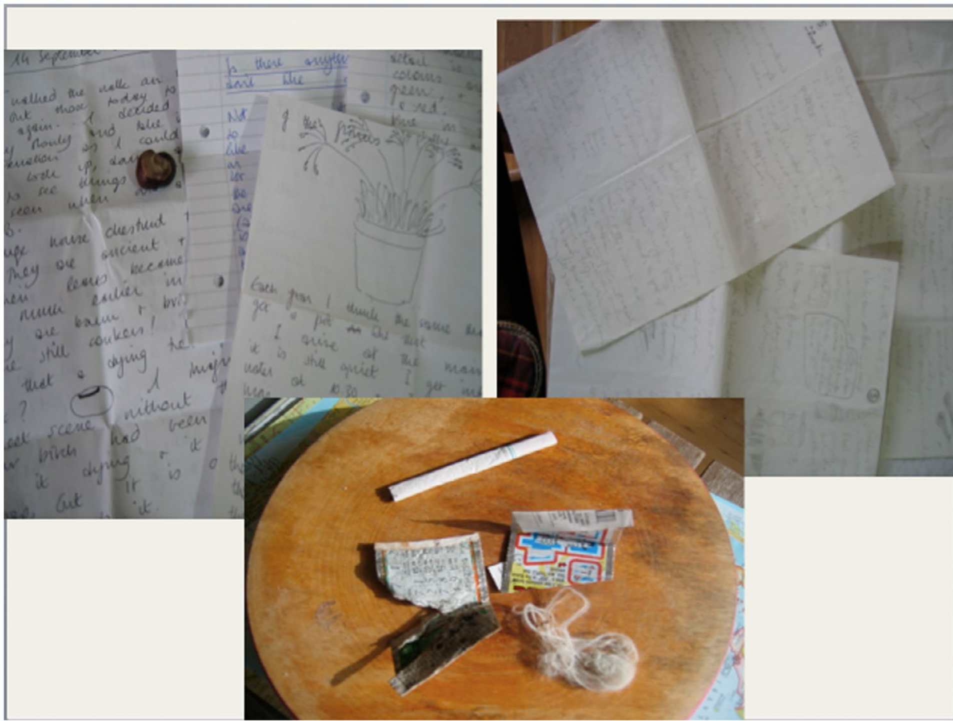

Figure 7. Participants' notes and found objects.

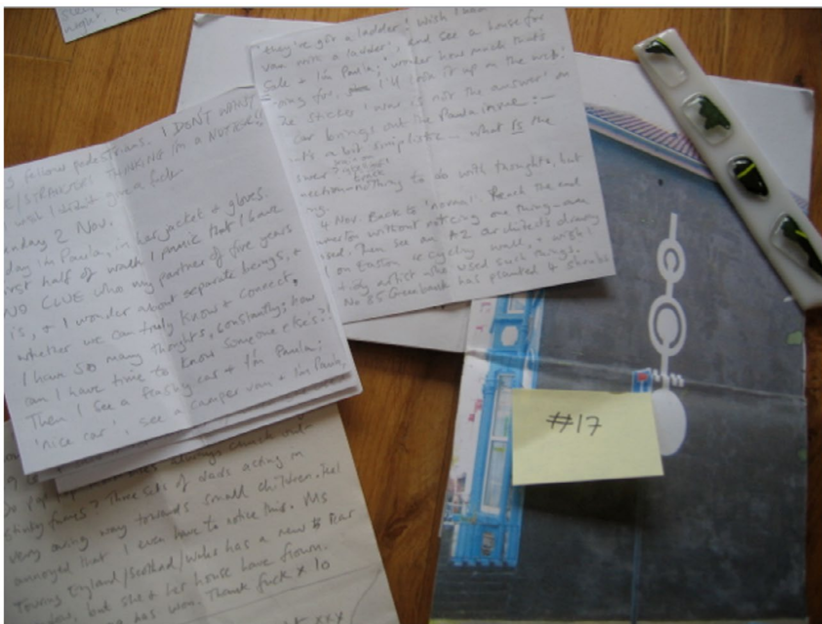

Figure 8. Participant's notes and found objects.
Notes: The research continues. Readers wishing to conduct the same experiments or improvisations may email me with a home postcode and a destination postcode for a regular walk. I will create a Walker's Pack and mail it to you with further instructions.

to recount is established, yet at the same time nondirective, in the sense that the only obligation is to recount'. (p. 22). Thus, the questions were open-ended and non-specific. Pre-Walks interviews varied in length from 6 to 15 min and Post-Walks Interviews[8] from 9 to 90 min.

Findings

The notion of the everyday walk as a kind of laboratory in which interruptions might provoke a more focused attention was affirmed by participants' observations of their own walking habits.

Echoing Rebecca Solnit (2000), Dee observed:

> I think the pace of it allows for a different type of consciousness, a different type of thinking space … I think in a car you are cut off from that and your relationship is different and I think on a bike you're … I think I'm much more conscious of cycling than I am of walking. I think I have to think much more about cycling than I do of walking. (Dee, April 2009, post)

Michael likes his everyday walk because 'you can choose your own pace … you've not got to think about anything, you can switch off'. (Michael, June 2008, pre). That is also why Julie enjoys her daily walk: 'Yeah, I mean … that's the pleasure of walking … shut yourself off a bit, mull things over'. (Julie, June 2008, pre). For Lin it's a time-space 'to ruminate'. (Lin, December 2009, post). Eve goes so far as to consider her everyday walk 'a bit like a meditation in that way the walking, the sort of thoughts [you] allow in and then allow out'. (Eve, October 2008, post). Phill likes 'the space and the time it takes to get from one place to the next place to either gather your thoughts, get rid of stuff before you go onto the next place'. (Phill, June 2009, post). For Eileen:

> the purpose of my walks quite often is to try and not think about things or to, you know, to kind of leave whatever's happening, you know … lots of busy thoughts to kind of leave them behind or … yeah, to have a rest. (Eileen, June 2008 pre)

For Mandy the walk to work provides 'just thinking and just time out when there's nobody asking you things or wanting things off you, you're just in your own world'. (Mandy, June 2008, pre). Nicola feels: 'if I'm walking I can just be in a world of my own and not worry about anything else'. (Nicola, July 2008, pre). Marcus did not like the process of making his everyday walk intentional. He felt that, 'choosing to do this thing changed the nature of the walk, in a way that I wasn't comfortable with. So it was like I couldn't just have my walk anymore'. (Marcus, June 2008, post).

Most participants saw the research walks as a welcome-enforced opportunity to take time out of their everyday to pay attention and become aware. Laurie W. observed that 'the exercise felt like – indulging in the sunny side of the street. It was very pleasant, warm, indulgent'. (Laurie W., September 2008, post). Many participants expressed how good it felt to have a purpose: 'That was quite nice, having a purposeful walk. Yeah, it was lovely. And I suddenly felt everything had an importance, which was really nice'. (Faith, March 2009, post). Phill felt 'it was nice to purposely make an effort to look. It felt like … only eating when you're hungry and being conscious of every mouthful and every chew, and so in a way it gave the walk that energy, not slowed it but gave it more of a purpose to it'. (Phillippa, June 2009, post). Eileen enjoyed 'just having that time out and license to be in my own little patch but be a bit different' (Eileen, June 2008, post).

Noticing the strange in the familiar

Participants noted that they tended to go in and out of noticing and encountering, being able to maintain a high level of attention for short periods of time only, confirming Seamon's (1976) notion of a continuum of attentiveness. KT noticed that taking photos caused her to 'look at things along my route with a fresh eye'. (KT, September 2008, post). Janet A. (20 November 2008). Janet was taken by surprise:

> Because I've got my observational powers heightened from this (laughs) I looked at this building and … I saw at the top of it, this window that … I've walked past this building for twenty-five years and I've never seen this window before, so that's just a bit unusual, so things like that. (Janet, November 2008, post)
>
> Vic observed:
>
> I felt, I mean thinking now, and every so often I sort of do it again, it's like a different way of looking at things is the way I would describe it. Obviously you notice things that you never notice, you really notice things. (Vic, December 2009, post)

In Post-walk interviews, participants described in detail their responses to each of the interruptions they had chosen in addition to making other observations about their walks. Milly started to create new meanings from what she noticed:

> For example, the first walk I did there was a … someone had knocked over a tin of paint right at the end there … and it was floor paint, and yet it was on the pavement so then I started this thing, when is a floor not a floor … so I noticed those things and I started thinking about floors and what makes a floor, is it a floor if it's … if it's got floor paint on, you know, that … all very thoughtful stuff! Which I might not have done if I wasn't doing the walk. (Milly, November 2008, post)

Nicola felt: 'It did make me think about the way I looked at things and it made me think about the way I was thinking'. (Nicola, February 2009, post). Phill saw potential for further interventions:

> I liked that it triggered my imagination of what else you could do with it and how you could enrich it and have a combination of interventions that you choose to do from a menu, as you gave, and also things that you would maybe bump into, that somebody else had already instigated. (Phill, June 2009, post)

Margaret felt that she was 'just enjoying it and not thinking about what I was going to buy as I went along'. (Margaret, September 2009, post). Julie said that 'looking at the different colours … actually made me engage with the street as a place in itself, not as something that gets in the way of me getting to the walk and so it's allowed me to just engage with that a bit differently'. (Julie, June 2008, post). Laurie B. noticed that she was noticing: 'And one of the times when I stopped, I saw two other things try to cross the street. A squirrel and a moth. Yeah. And they were faster than me cause I was stopped. And I was like, normally I realized that I might be aware of the other humans in cars and bikes, but – and the squirrels a little bit, but that was kind of fun. And it was a yellow moth' (Laurie B., September 2008, post).

Participants also felt a pleasurable absorption in the exercises. Eileen felt really 'immersed in the activity, which was very enjoyable considering it's such a simple intervention into what I do probably three times a day on average' (Eileen, August 2008, post).

Dee felt that 'noticing everything that colour on the route … that's a really absorbing activity, so it takes you on a very deep focus for the length of the walk which was forty-five minutes …' (Dee, May 2009, post). The exercise prompted Laurie W. to ask:

> What is that about, again, sort of focusing attention and what does that do, um, and I read an article, um, a portrait of Woody Allen at some point, um, recently and he was talking about that the reason that he finds filmmaking so, um, attractive to him is that it's so fully engaging, you know, and that the rest of the time he just, he basically has all this angst about being alive. (Laurie W., September 2008, post)

As participants have observed, pleasure is derived from concentration and engaging with detail. Lin sees it as a chance to encounter other people and things: 'People have always walked places so there's that connection with other people you know. You see more things, you quite often talk to people on the way or you see a cat you know …' (Lin, June 2008, pre). Iain was clear that having other kinds of encounters was another reason to walk:

> … had a nice conversation with a nice man the other day, when we caught up with each other at the traffic lights, 'Bloody hell, you're the only person I've ever met walking to work who goes faster than I do!' And you have those kind of chance encounters that you don't have hermetically sealed in a car. (Iain, May 2009, pre)

Walking & talking

Interruption #6 'Talk to at least one person while you're out on your route' invited participants to make an intentional encounter through talking to someone on their walk, necessitating going out of themselves into an *i-don't-know* space of openness and potentially, vulnerability. It required participants to encounter the unknown within their familiar territory, in the private space of their walk, in public space. I was therefore surprised to find that nine participants, over one quarter of the group, had chosen this interruption and had specific reasons for choosing it. Eve was clear:

> That one [interruption] I really wanted to do because … I do find it really difficult talking to strangers, you know, to get a conversation going and I really admire that in people, people who are able to just … get chatting to people in the street or you know in the shop, I really admire that quality, so I thought I'd like to have a go and then remind myself why I don't. (Eve, October 2008, post).

Julie felt she was known in her neighbourhood for her somewhat eccentric behaviour so talking to a stranger didn't feel too difficult: 'It was slightly out of my comfort zone but not so far out that I felt that … I would have really stood out'. (Julie, May 2008, post). Cindy, having moved from a rural area to a more urban environment, observed that people in an urban environment did not greet her as she walked, until she took the initiative to greet them:

> People don't look at you. They don't acknowledge your presence. It's almost as though either they're in their own little world and they don't want to be bothered, or, um, I don't know what that is, but I found that so odd, you know, and – so I would address people, greet people, and, and, then I began to think, well, maybe it's because there are so many people out and about here that it just becomes tiresome. So I got in the habit of not doing it, also. And so I thought, well, this is an opportunity to sort of break that habit and get back into, into doing that, um. So that was really interesting … Once you speak to people then they're just, they're just fine, you know, they're all about, 'Oh, hi!'. (Cindy, September 2008, post)

Julie experienced a similar response: 'They all said hello back, "Oooh, nice dog," or "Lovely day."' She added: 'There wasn't one who felt uncomfortable with me saying hello to them'. She felt her experience of this was helped again by the presence of her dog, as it had helped her feel less out of place standing on a corner: '… [I]f I'd been standing on my own they might have called the police'. She also felt that 'people, particularly if you show positivity towards

them, they're sort of positive back … ninety-nine percent of the time'. (Julie, May 2008, post). Laura tries to acknowledge people she doesn't know as a way of trying to cut through what might be seen to be English indifference: 'I'm not sure why, but strangers have always tended to chat to me. I think this may be because I tend to acknowledge people's existence more than the English culture tends to allow for. If I catch someone's eye, I smile rather than quickly avert my gaze' (Laura, January 2009, post).

Attempting to engage passers-by in conversation means breaking the familiar rhythm and pace of our walk and going out of our way, perhaps literally. Phill noticed that a walk that normally takes her five minutes took her a lot longer: 'You talk to quite a lot of people lot round here, it's quite a friendly environment, that waylaid me quite a long time. I seem to remember it took about 40 min to get where I was going on that particular occasion' (Phill, June 2009, post).

There are also certain social boundaries that participants didn't want to transgress. Cindy didn't want to appear rude: 'I was going to talk to people who I ran into, and I didn't see too many people. And the one person I saw, she was really quietly sitting and reading her book and I didn't want – it just felt like I'm not going to – so I tried to, but I just, I felt it was rude, so I didn't interrupt her'. (Cindy, September 2008, post). Laurie B. felt similarly disinclined to talk to the one person she encountered on her route. So merely considering the idea of talking to another person participants already moved out of their comfort zones by trying to understand what is it about the process that is difficult, enjoyable or uncomfortable. Val made several failed attempts, offering 'Afternoon' to an elderly couple who 'sat mute and looked like waxworks', and 'Beautiful day' to an elderly lady, who also didn't respond. (Val, January 2009, post). Sarah experienced stranger encountering in the following way:

> I talked to quite a few people, it got me chatting to all sorts of people, saying 'hello' and I talked to a couple across the street, I even got to know their names and now we wave to each other all the time. There's this old white woman and an old black man … I'm really glad I talked to them now … and then there's another woman further down the road … (Sarah, May 2008, post)

She has continued this spontaneous acquaintance, writing in her notes 'We chat now'. Faith, sees walking her daughter to school as 'an opportunity to be social'. Over the years she has become friends with a number of parents in Easton who also walk their children to school, where this everyday walking offers a time-space for nurturing of relationships through 'little bits of conversations'. Although 'sometimes all that actually means is a raised eyebrow and a look of compassion and understanding over the head of a screaming child' the look itself 'can be hugely beneficial and supportive' (Faith, June 2008, post).

Vic suggested that talking to people is 'part of the deal' of living in a neighbourhood. The Gloucester Road, in the neighbourhood of Bishopston is especially busy on a Saturday, when it can take a long time to walk down it 'cause you just always bump into people who want to chat' (Vic, December 2009, post) and Vic acknowledges that you have to be prepared to stop and chat. I was struck by the idea that living in a particular neighbourhood might bring with it responsibilities, (Massey, 2007) and that one responsibility might be to walk down the road and talk to people on the way. Vic's walk down the Gloucester Road on a Saturday, then, is a time-space for encountering and re-establishing connections to neighbourhood and neighbours. Claire reflected that the project 'made me realise how many people I know … on that walk, whether it's just by sight … or like the man who always feeds pigeons under the bridge and the man who's quite often stood outside the Sugar Loaf a little the worse for, you know, the wear or whatever' (Claire, November 2008, post).

The research project extended these notions, offering participants the opportunity to talk to a stranger during a familiar walk in their neighbourhood. KT also felt differently after trying this experiment: 'it was sort of empowering to know what's going on, or to kind of like, step back and, and, and figure out … and talk to the strikers and kind of find out what was happening. I walked past this a million times and never bothered to really stop and try to find out'. (KT, September 2008, post). Entertaining the notion of a stranger encounter can involve a significant number and complexity of thoughts. Eve was conscious of differentiation and similarity at the same time, of the sense of sharing but of not being the same, pointing to the deeper and wider issue of the encounter with another. Letting go of our desire for similarity and commonality means we may be able to listen to and see the other, creating what Finn (1996) sees as an authentic ethical exchange between two (or more) people:

> you kind of look around and you think … on the surface people … you don't know what's going on in their lives and … the moment that you … in the moment that you encounter them they're … they have the same experience as you or they're in the same space, you're in the … you can't really see what it is, you know, that makes them … different to you, you know there's … in that … in that street and that moment there's the shared experience sort of thing that … so you can only kind of see the similarities I guess between you. (Eve, October 2008, post)

The end of the experiment: switching on and off, regret and relief (at not having to be aware)

Echoing Seamon (1976), Eilis observed that paying attention results quickly in a bombardment of the senses, which is so overwhelming that we need to 'switch off' in order to get on with our daily lives, thus becoming less attentive. Participants observed that to be continually aware and noticing takes too much time and energy to be a daily practice – it becomes another chore. However, to experience this process *now and then* appears to be more sustainable and a welcome opportunity for participants to reflect on their thought processes and extend those reflections. Participants demonstrated a growing receptivity to and awareness of, their surroundings, which continued after the project had ended. This receptivity for a heightened awareness might be developed to enable a more frequent questioning and provoking of thought processes and reflections beyond the everyday concrete preoccupations of our life world. Such reflections might then be fed back changing habits and assumptions echoing Ingold's (2000) notion of the continuous process of encountering as we move through the life world.

Participants also registered changes once the experiment was at an end, expressing a mixture of regret and relief on finishing the walks. Milly felt like she was 'closing a project … so there was a … bit of relief and a bit of regret and there was a bit of ... 'sorriness' that I wasn't doing another intervention … so a mix really'. (Milly, November 2008, post). Faith felt similarly: 'So … there's part of it that's kind of like okay, I just don't have to think about writing up notes, and that's kind of good and there's a part of, it's quite nice having a kind of purpose, as well'. (Faith, March 2009, post). Dee felt in one way 'quite relieved just to be walking again because it's actually quite exhausting in a mental way … I was quite tired of looking for the colour plum, you know? I was quite tired of finding my way home, so there was a sort of liberation of just walking again'. (Dee, May 2009, post). Janet was less ambivalent: 'If I'm really honest, when I didn't need to do the walk, when I didn't need to do this [experiment], I felt like it was a burden lifted off this walk!' (Janet, November 2008, post). Vic, too, had tired of

the effort it took him to be aware: 'Today again, I started noticing things again, sometimes I think I'd rather drive it!' (Vic, December 2009, post). Janet felt that:

> what made it harder was that it had to be such a conscious action … you couldn't just do it like you do in your normal life, like put on your coat and rush out and dash down the road and dash back. You had to really think so although the walk itself didn't need to take any longer, and even this writing up wasn't unpleasant because I quite like it but it still was, it was the consciousness thing. You actually have to use your brain to do something that you might not normally do. (Janet, November 2008, post)

A habit of receptivity

Participants' heightened awareness and receptivity, deepened their abilities to listen and observe, preparing the ground for Finn's (1996) ethical encounter. Participants began to see their surroundings and people within them with new eyes, from the perspective of engaged observer, slightly outside the categories they habitually inhabited, yet sufficiently familiar within the parameters of their everyday walk. As such they were developing a receptivity to encounter, within the everyday, embodying Finn's notion of 'establishing relationships with others … beyond and between the categories that render us knowable' (1996, p. 155). Although participants expressed reservations about talking to strangers during their walks, many did attempt to do this, as demonstrated by these findings. A couple of participants have even continued relationships with the people they talked to. For some the walk has changed them and their surroundings: Janet observed: 'I always do this walk so as I say its very familiar so once I've got this greater consciousness thing going then the whole thing's changed for me and so now when I go, I'm remembering this whole performance … It's sort of raised my consciousness. It has changed and the environment looks very different'. (Janet, November 2008, post). And Dee: 'I think it has changed the walk, like there are now other memories laid down upon it like the memory of me doing these things or the memory of the women saying "Well, is everyone in a rush today?" or little snippets of conversation that come back at the places where I heard them … so I think the walk has all these other moments in it now' (Dee, May 2009, post).

A shift in disposition

The process of this experiment created a shift in what Ravaisson (2008) terms the disposition of habit, which he argues is the core of permanence. In other words, participants might experience a return to old habits but the receptivity I have referred to, or the disposition which makes this receptivity possible, is altered. A habit is frequently efficient and pleasurable, so there might be no reason to change it, but it is the disposition to change which is significant. This produces the tension between participants wanting to do more interventions yet at the same time not wanting to, between what might be considered a cognizance of a responsibility or desire to become aware and the desire to switch off from that feeling of responsibility. This research project, with its interruption of an everyday habit invited participants to become aware of these habitual patterns, with the view that, if desirable, altering them is possible through a transformation of their disposition to any change in those. It is this flux, a moving between, the accessing of a conduit, that is fundamental to an understanding of how we might create methods for enhancing our receptivity to encounter,

dialogue, risk-taking and critical thinking in relation to our perceptions and assumptions about our life world and how we inhabit it. This kind of improvisatory and performative practice of interrupting habits and assumptions employing an everyday walk in a neighbourhood offers unique and significant strategies for developing awareness of our neighbourhoods and surroundings. It goes further by requiring participant walkers to question and reflect on their thought processes thus developing the potential for individual change and openness to the unfamiliar and strange, with a view to increasing receptivity for communication and dialogue. The significance of the research resides in its use of playful, interruptions on a corporeal level within an everyday embodied practice, in this case walking, to create a receptivity to change in an individual's assumptions and attitudes. The findings suggest that such experiments and improvisations might be applied to other areas of our life world, in order to provoke changes in habits – in areas such as commuter travel, environmental and ecological issues and conflict resolution. It also extends the growing field of walking projects, interventions and experiments, offering individuals, artists, geographers and urban planners new and unique ways of engaging people with their localities and neighbours as well as potential strangers through aesthetic interventions that are part of our everyday.

Notes

1. Participants were happy to be named and some requested this. No one expressed the wish to remain anonymous. Participants were interviewed before and after their walks. I prepared sets of questions for each of these which are available on request. Many participants talked at length, going beyond the questions and offering a wide variety of interesting and thought-provoking ideas that contributed to the research. Their words are cited thus: (Dee, April 2009, pre) for a pre-walks interview with a volunteer and (Claire, November 2008, post)for a post-walks interview with a volunteer.
2. *Desire line* – Although the definition is not to be found in the Oxford or Chambers dictionary, a desire line or desire path is an urban planning term used to denote paths which are created by humans or animals which diverges from concrete or paved roads. They may be created because of a lack of these. Wordspy.com suggests it is: an informal path that pedestrians prefer to take to get from one location to another rather than using a sidewalk or other official route.

   Wikipedia suggests: a *desire* path (also known as a *desire line*, social trail, cow path, goat track, pig trail or bootleg trail) can be a path created as a consequence of erosion caused by human or animal foot-fall or traffic. The path usually represents the shortest or most easily navigated route between an origin and destination. Width and erosion severity can be indicators of how much traffic a path receives. Desire paths emerge as shortcuts where constructed ways take a circuitous route, have gaps or are non-existent. Desire path – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Desire**_path
3. Participants in a walk mis-guided by Wrights & Sites at WALK21 in Zurich, 2005
4. Chipwalk chip paper, from walk walk walk's Chip Shop Tour as part of *E8: the Heart of Hackney* exhibition, June 2008.
5. The Feldenkrais Method has become an internationally accepted way of re-training the body to move more freely through increased awareness of our habitual patterns of movement: 'The Feldenkrais Method® uses movement as a sensory measure, employing developmental movement patterns experienced in the growing infant who learns how to gain flexibility, strength and mobility. In the adult patterns of use occur which can inhibit and limit movement. These patterns that we use unconsciously in adult life can be re-orientated to improve function'. http://www.feldenkraisforyou.co.uk/what-is-feldenkrais/ accessed 4 November 2009.
6. 'Walk' here is in parentheses because Laura uses a wheelchair and calls her walking activity 'trolleying'.

7. Eileen, for example, often makes the walk to her local shop three times a day.
8. Post Walk interviews which were conducted once the participant informed me they had completed the four walks. These took place in cafes, homes and on walks. Almost all of the participants had a lot to say about their walks. Discussions lasted from 9 to 90 min. They discussed with me their notes, drawings, photographs and found objects. Questions that I created to encourage discussion were usually not necessary. The questionnaires for both the Pre and Post Walks Interviews can be sent on request, as can more detailed findings.

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