

# Qualitative Researcher



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## Editorial Kate Moles

Mobile methods, and in particular walking methodologies, are increasingly adopted by researchers wishing to engage with ideas of place and identity. Walking is a fundamental practice in our social lives, and it has also been a common method adopted in much anthropological and, increasingly, sociological fieldwork (Lee and Ingold, 2006). Such approaches are underpinned by the notion that, through walking with participants, the landscape also becomes active in the conversation. The rhythm of the walk offers engagements and disengagements, a mass of encounters, diversions and disruptions. The motion, commotion and distractions are productive in the sharing of intimate narratives, as conversations meander at the pace of the walk, leading to unhurried sharing of narratives. These research encounters are 'rooted' in the everyday, yet the walks open up avenues for the exploration of memories and imagined futures. The bodily experience of walking means that the rhythms of the walk, of the movement, permeate the encounter, shaping the way the research interaction occurs. Conversation ebbs and flows, and pauses are filled with the movement and the distractions that appear; topics rise and fall, attention shifts and wanes as the temporal and spatial stretches out in front and behind. The five articles comprising this issue pay attention to the co-ingredience of walking, talking, and landscape in various ways and describe the different forms that such methodological walks may take.

Walking in research might be with participants who would be walking anyway – as with the rambler Ronander accompanies

in her article, or it might be a way of getting people to think about the places you walk through with them, as in the articles by Inwood and Adey and Stevenson. For Halfacree and McGuinness, walking is discussed as a particular way to be in a place; the movement through, the route taken, leading to an appreciation of the interaction between the walker and the landscape. These different ways of incorporating walking and walkers into research offer alternate ways of uncovering how people come to know place, how places are constructed through the practice of walking, and how walking allows us to appreciate places in a different way to, for example, reflecting on it from afar, or perhaps driving or cycling through it.

The articles in this issue of *Qualitative Researcher* remind us that walking means different things depending on who you walk with, why you are walking, and where you are going. For Ronander, walking is a social activity, an activity through which you made friends or acquaintances, and as an activity which prompted interaction in some cases. For Inwood, the people he walked with made the places through which they walk significant, an observation emphasised by participants sense of being 'out of place' or feeling uneasy as they moved through the locations that was particularly salient. Halfacree reflects on how walking with his infant son Andrei, and the material artefact of the pram, made him engage with the places he walked through in a different manner than before. Without the necessity to 'go' somewhere with his walk, these journeys took on alternative meaning, a way of engaging differently with the places he

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moved through and thus producing different encounters. For McGuinness, the walks of the young people who were part of his research had a particular destination – school – and so it was through different ways of moving towards that destination that formed the basis of his paper. The different sensory engagement with places, and the level of description walkers highlight the way in which the different ways we move through places relate to the ways we experience, remember, imagine, and relate to them.

Engaging with walking as method and practice, Ronander looks into organised walking practices and how these constitute particular social settings. The paper considers how meaning is attached to the act of walking, and interrogates this in relation to the adoption of it as a method. Through this reflective engagement with her participant's practice and her own engagement with them through a method reliant on walking, she thinks about the material and imaginary places they move into. For Inwood, it is the dislocating potential of walking that

makes it a potent method. By walking around a university campus, the 'roving focus group' allows the researcher to engage with the reactions of the participants as and where they happen; allowing the relationship between identity and place to be felt in all its disconcerting force. This paper interrogates this artificial distinction between method and practice, and looks at how the act of walking around with the focus group allowed the researcher to engage with the immediacy of the spatial encounters.

Adey and Stevenson shift their focus to two subjects that are not often involved in walking methods; very young children and their microgeographies of the home. By embarking on tours around the home with these young children, the researchers were able to uncover spatial and temporal patterns that would have remained opaque without the adoption of this method. This paper is useful in locating the method in the microgeography of the home, and thinking about the important places that are available to very young children, how they traverse them

and interact with them.

Halfacree focuses on the potential of walking to disrupt habit and routine; how walking can take you to unexpected places – both in terms of the routes you take, but also the encounters that this produces. Walking with his children, one and then both, made him consider his encounters with the spaces he walked in new ways. This paper highlights the participatory experience of walking, and how engagement with place through this practice disrupts previously held understandings and expectations. McGuinness is also interested in the experience of walking, for primary school aged children. He describes how walking to school was a different experience from being driven, and how that impacted on the ways these young people encountered the places they moved through. This paper considers this by drawing on multi-sensory accounts from the young people.

## Are you interested in hearing more about Mobile Methods?

### Walking Workshop: Methods Going Mobile

Date: 4 November 2010

Venue: WISERD, Cardiff University

Walking and mobile methods are increasingly adopted by researchers wishing to engage with ideas of place and identity. As part of this walking method, the participant might take the researcher on a guided walk, show them around their 'patch', or accompany them on a 'bimble around'. The landscape becomes an active participant in the conversation, and the rhythm of the walk offers engagements and disengagements, a mass of encounters, diversions and disruptions. The motion, commotion and distractions are productive in the sharing of intimate narratives, as conversations meander at the pace of the walk, leading to unhurried sharing of narratives. These research encounters are 'rooted' in the everyday, yet the walks open up avenues for the exploration of memories and imagined futures. Walking methods allow the space for narratives to be shared, to be opened up, closed down, diverted and revisited.

By looking at the different types of walks that can be part of research; for example, as method with guided walks, go-alongs, bimbles and as practice, with looking at how walking actively constructs the way we come to 'know' places – we could begin to think about the potential that research going mobile has. There are theoretical, methodological and practical issues to be considered with walking. The walking workshop engages with these topics to produce a coherent and informative day.

To register your interest in this event please email [wiserd.events@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:wiserd.events@cardiff.ac.uk)

# The restorative dynamics of walking together

Karolina Ronander

## Introduction

Recently, social scientists have increasingly been seeking analytical purchase on the mobile nature of everyday life (Buscher, Urry & Witchger forthcoming; Buscher & Urry 2009; Ek & Hultman 2008; Ross, Renold, Holland & Hillman 2009) and the performativity of social action (Cragg 2005; Cresswell 2002; Lorimer 2005; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). The purpose of this paper is to contribute to these wider methodological concerns with how spatial practices are embodied and practiced through a reflection on walking not only as an object of study, but as a method of research. The paper does this through a consideration of the approach to ethnographic research that Jon Anderson (2004) terms 'talking whilst walking' (TWW). This is done within the context of my ongoing doctoral research into group walking practices and subjective well-being. The paper is organised around a consideration of how walking together with participants enables insights into the social dynamics of group walking and the importance of social relations for the 'restorative experience'. I begin by introducing and discussing my reasons for adopting the 'TWW' approach. Then I move on to discuss one finding in detail, which is that the social dynamics of walking together are shaped by how the physical activity impacts upon styles of interaction between people.

The talking whilst walking approach to collecting field data (Anderson 2004; Anderson and Moles 2008) is an extension of the traditional approach to participant observation with a geographic angle. The geographer is interested in identifying the spatial patterns of social knowledge during an event, through being there, in place, in the thick of what happens, to be involved in its unfolding. More specifically, this approach involves an investment in the potential of the moving body. Through 'bimbling' together (Anderson 2004) the researcher is present to harness those elements of social knowledge that are unstated, or recalled prompted by the practice of moving ones body through place.

My interest in researching walking practices, as an embodied, affected, and relational encounter with landscape, at-

tracted me to the 'TWW' methodological approach to data collection for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I was in no doubt that I needed to be perceived as, and enact the role of, the fellow walker in order to 'witness' the easily obscured registers of experience that are not available in post-hoc interviews. Being there, a part of the mundane flow of things, means that you can train yourself to be awake to the seemingly banal and often unnoticed world of emotions, movements, gestures, and small talk. Anderson (2004; 2009) and Anderson and Moles (2008) have pointed out how walking together with participants allows the researcher to harness practical and embodied knowledge that is derived from the experience of being in place.

Through exploring the relational aspects of group walking, I have been able to witness interactions amongst other walkers, and to take part in the making of collaborative knowledge through talking to fellow walkers whilst walking; both to explore their understanding of group sociality and its impact on the restorative element of walking, and to draw on my own experience of placing myself within this relational nexus.

## Group sociality and 'restorative' experience

An important insight that has emerged from walking together with my participants is that the physical activity of walking influences social interactions. Indeed *walking together* seems to facilitate social bonds in a unique way. The following interview passage is an example of a 'walking friendship' developed between two bereaved men who twice a week meet up for a walk with their local walking group:

A: *I palled up with that gentleman there in the trilby hat, he lost his wife a month after mine, so we had something in common, so now everybody knows us as "Don and Allan". They get our names mixed up so we had some t-shirts done saying "I'm not Don" and "I'm Allan".*

The social dimension of group walking is by no means unproblematic, however, and it varies greatly between different groups. Within the Ramblers' network of

walks, my local 5 mile group is the most popular, it attracts between 30 to 40 walkers per walk and the few members that turn up every week are outnumbered by those who turn up less frequently and thus need to re-establish social relationships each time. Whereas the 3 mile and the 10 mile groups both have around 10 members who devotedly come most weeks and get to know each other well. One participant, who occasionally joins the 5 mile group but prefers to walk with his extended circle of friends, comments:

P: *...if you're walking with friends you'd be talking about different things, because by and large most people know each other... when you join a group of thirty, forty, you sort of see people intermittently and so it's a much slower process [of getting to know people] than if you were, you know, at work or in another institution.*

The social dimension of group walking is constitutive of the experience, and, for most of my participants, the motivation to join the Ramblers. Although the nature of the group impacts on the process of establishing familiarity between group members, talking whilst walking facilitates entering personal registers more rapidly than other forms of social interaction. This is because interaction whilst walking allows for fewer non-verbal signals to pass between individuals. Eye contact is infrequent and brief while attention is focused ahead and in front. Walkers often follow, or walk alongside, each other, thus making eye contact requires the walker to cast glances behind them or turn their head to the side. This is often awkward as walkers often need to pay attention to the terrain underfoot to negotiate such things as mud, puddles, protruding tree roots and rocks. Eye contact is considered by some social psychologists (e.g. Ellsworth & Ludwig 2008) to vary as a function of the affective tone of interaction. Low levels of eye contact have been shown to indicate social distance and facilitate sharing of more personal, potentially embarrassing information (see Modigliani 1971). In this case, the social interaction that takes place whilst walking is experienced as low in emotional intensity because walkers make less eye-contact. This arguably

facilitates more emotionally charged talk between walkers. As one participant comments:

M: *it might be easier to talk about difficult things, you know, because you're looking ahead, you're not giving eye contact, you've got time haven't you to have gaps in the conversation or go slowly.*

I have found that this benefits the relationship between researcher-walker and participant-walker too. Talking whilst walking enables an encounter between researcher and participant that is grounded in shared circumstances and experiences of embodiment (see Lee & Ingold 2006). Participating in group walks has meant that I have been able to witness and be a part of the social dynamics of the group, and walking *with* my participants - 'where "with" implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas' (Lee & Ingold 2006: 67) - has meant that my understanding of their practice goes beyond a reliance on what they would later be able to recount in a post-event interview.

Unlike a traditional seated interview where researcher and participant are typically seated opposite each other with direct eye contact, the walking interview can be experienced by participants as less invasive and facilitate conversations at a deeper emotional level. This is illustrated by this brief excerpt from my field diary:

*It was a bright, warm afternoon and we walked a bit further than planned through some woods near his home. The interview took a different turn than I expected, when I first spoke to him on the group walk I took him for a very matter-of-fact sort of person, but the conversation quickly turned to his very personal thoughts and his struggle with depression. I sensed that he didn't want to go back at the end of the walk, and he commented how he was glad to have been able to talk about things that he wouldn't normally speak about. (24 September, walk near Titchfield Common, Fareham).*

As this passage exemplifies, there can sometimes be a therapeutic dimension to the interview encounter itself. An interview can allow participants the (for some, rare) opportunity to talk about

themselves, which can be a positive experience and allow for self-reflection. If we look to anthropology, techniques of interviewing in natural settings is nothing new (see de Laine 2000) and have been used as a form of 'probing' to 'break silences, oppose resistances and unravel thoughts on matters people prefer to keep hidden' (de Laine 2000: 79). The relative ease of sharing emotional information in this type of interview encounter calls for some ethical considerations, as it may result in a participant subsequently feeling uncomfortable with the level of intimacy achieved. It is then important to maintain focus on the purpose of the interview and not blur the boundaries between the research interview and a therapeutic interview where intervention and change is the goal (see Hutchinson and Wilson 1994). Ethnographic methods that call for close participation, such as the 'TWW' technique, also require an ongoing negotiation of the researcher's role in relation to their participants. In the interview which is the focus of the field notes above, the participant's mental health was only discussed in direct relation with his walking practice, and thus the purpose of the interview and the limits of my role as researcher - as opposed to therapist or confidante - was kept in focus.

The difference that walking makes for social interaction is perhaps greatest when researcher and participant walk alone, as in the walk I describe above, but I have found that most group walking events allow for enough privacy for this difference to still be relevant. Another participant, a longstanding member of the 10 mile group, describes the familiarity and support that is developed between walkers in the course of walking together in a relatively small group:

L: *you get to meet lots of people and have a chat to people and you know, become part of their lives, and I feel that they're there for you as well, if you're feeling a bit sort of down you know, they seem like a family, I think, to me.*

What the participant is referring to here, is what we could term 'walking friendships' within her regular walking group. Along with most other walkers I interviewed, this particular participant had not pursued the friendships with her fellow group members outside of the walk setting. The walking group for her, is a contained social sphere, that sustains her whilst she is within its fold, but

which does not encompass her life outside of walking. This particular aspect of group sociality has been described by some participants as central to what they find restorative about group walking. The following conversation illustrates this:

H: *Walking de-stresses me, and I also think that it has something to do with chatting to people. I'm very busy and it's quite stressful, and here you can meet new people and talk to them about other things*

Me: *so it takes you out of your normal social environment?*

H: *Yeah, yeah exactly. They're not people I see normally, and you can talk about completely different things*

However, the restorative aspect of either sustained or fleeting 'walking friendships' should not be presumed unproblematic, as a number of researchers have pointed out that the restorative potential of a given place or practice is highly context dependent and experienced differently by different people or at different times (e.g. Conradson 2005; Milligan & Bingley 2007; Wakefield & McMullan 2005). The group walk event itself and its relational sphere is often experienced by participants as 'time out', but when considered from the point of view of well-being, benefits both short-term and long-term are complex and sometimes contradictory. The walking group, as 'retreat' from everyday life, offers a temporary restorative effect, enacted within the multiple spheres of relation between walkers and place. Contained within this temporary experience of renewal, though, is the potential for these fleeting moments of retreat to make a difference to an individual's long-term well-being if they are undertaken regularly.

### To sum up

In this short piece I have touched on some of the ways that walking together with participants, can generate insights about the ways that bodily movement interacts with the social. When your analytic object is the walking body, an attention to movement itself is vital. Furthermore, talking whilst walking with participants is a step closer to taking serious the call for methodologies that are sensitive to 'the experience of the world in their *moments of creation*' (Anderson 2009: 291). As ever,

though, critical and ethical considerations need to be taken seriously, however we manage and style the contact with our participants. Being co-present in place opens up new potentialities for analysis, and enables an attentiveness to the complex relational ecologies (Conradson 2005) that bind practice and place.

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## Exploring Spatial (Dis)locations Through the Use of Roving Focus Groups

Joshua Inwood  
Deborah Martin

In 2005, we conducted research that focused on the experiences of African American undergraduate students at a large U.S. university (Inwood and Martin 2008). Our goal was to better understand how race –or more accurately, “whiteness”— was evoked in the landscape of the university. As part of this research we employed two ‘roving focus groups’ in which 5-8 African American

students led the first author through the campus and discussed the ways in which the campus embodied particular racial narratives as well as the relationship between the cultural landscape and their own life stories on the campus<sup>1</sup>. We created these roving groups because we felt that certain elements of the landscape were hard to recall in an interview; walking them with the research partici-

pants, we felt sure, would ground our understandings in the actual spaces and places which participants were discussing. Based on that experience, we argue here that roving focus groups offer critical information about place and space that simply does not emerge in interviews or focus groups in fixed locations. Indeed, when dealing with issues of identity and “insider/outsider” spaces,

walking to and through particular places may be the most efficient way to understand –see, experience, and define– the spatial marginalizations and transgressions that so many individuals daily practice and experience.

Our research focus was on examining a university campus landscape with an eye to how it explicitly and implicitly addressed race in the context of US race relations and debates about access to the university and affirmative action policies. The method of the roving focus group was borne out of two core ideas that informed our project. First, research on race and racism must focus on individual life experiences while simultaneously grounding those experiences in everyday spaces, places, and structures (Tyner 2002; Schein 2009). In other words, while racial processes are always part of individual encounters and experiences, they are produced not simply in social interaction, but through social structures, including space (Delaney 2002). We need to effectively employ, therefore, methods that help us to navigate these tensions between individual experience and social structures and meanings. This problem is not new for social science, of course, but one particularly highlighted in scholarship on racialization processes. Second, much of the research on race and racism often treats place as background noise, when in fact identity is very much place contingent (Delaney 2002; Pulido 2006; Barraclough 2009). As Schein (2009, 819) notes, research “regarding questions of race requires [a focus] upon specific places in all their gritty ugliness”. Bringing research participants into the everyday spaces and places where they live and work makes sense and, as we found, can lead to insights not previously illuminated in more traditional interview approaches.

### Walking the Campus

The concept of the ‘mobile interview’ is not new (e.g. Burgess 1996; Anderson 2004; Murray 2009; Ross et al 2009; Scott et al. 2009). As Lee and Ingold note, walking as a method is a way to more fully “perceive the multi-sensory environment to the fullest, and [as a method] can claim to be close to whatever is happening in the area” (Lee and Ingold, 2006, 68). Anderson (2004) found walking with interviewees can prompt discoveries about the landscape that interview participants didn’t recall in more formal interview situations. In addition, Moles (2008, 1.4) contends that “the mobility of walking particular envi-

ronments allows for the creation of meaning. By walking people are able to connect to places through the grounded experience on their material environment.” As these authors point out, the practice of walking facilitates getting research participants comfortable and allows for a feeling of connectivity to the environments and landscapes. Walking with research subjects allows a kind of camaraderie to build between research participants and the interviewer through the very aspect of a collective ambling through trails and across the countryside (Lee and Ingold 2006). Perhaps most importantly, walking and conducting interviews creates a kind of “three-way conversation, with interviewer, participant and locality all engaged in the exchange of ideas” (Moles 2008, 5.3).

We found that our roving focus groups differed from these approaches in subtle and important ways. First, much of the research and writing on walking interviews focuses on the ways in which it allows research participants to connect more fully with the spaces and places they are talking about - a way to ground their life experiences in a particular connected geography (e.g. Anderson 2004, 257 and the concept of ‘bimbling’, to “re-connect with the surrounding environment”). In addition, the act of walking often serves to connect researchers themselves to those landscapes (Anderson 2004). The very nature of research on race often revolves on precisely the opposite experience - the ways in which particular racialized subjectivities are *out of place* in particular environments. As Delaney (2002, 7) points out “space is an enabling technology through which race is produced” as it freezes “territorial division [...] into dichotomous insides and outsides.” As different groups or individuals occupy, or perhaps more precisely move through space, different racialized subjectivities are articulated and reinforced as different racialized positions are either “in place” or “out of place”<sup>2</sup>. Space is an enabling technology precisely because race then is reproduced and reinforced as individuals move through the landscape, as the landscape “facilitates the polarization [of race] and hence the freezing of identities into ‘we’ and ‘they’” (Delaney 2002, 7). By focusing on the experiences of African American undergraduate students on the university campus, our roving focus group highlighted their *dislocations* in that landscape, which is key to understanding the role space, place and landscape play in reproducing racial inequality.

For example, the university where we conducted our inquiry was steeped in the complicated racialized history of the southern United States. We found that even in the “progressive” rhetoric of race-blind multi-culturalism which is pervasive at contemporary U.S. universities (Williams 1998), students were forced to navigate the university with care in order to avoid instances of racism. This is an added dimension of the roving focus group as students were able to share strategies for navigating the racialized landscape. In interviews prior to the focus groups, every student recounted at least one experience on the campus of having racial slurs directed at them on campus. In the roving focus group setting we found that students were able to discuss strategies and give opinions about the best way to avoid those situations. Students discussed in great depth certain routes to take when coming from downtown and which streets not to take to avoid passing by certain fraternities or apartment complexes where students either had direct experience in being discriminated against, or had heard stories from other African American students about negative experiences. These experiences illuminated the ways the landscape reinforces and rearticulates historical racialized positions. Thus the collective act of walking through landscapes revealed a wealth of information that the more formal interaction of researcher-and-interviewee conversation did not. By employing the roving focus group method we were able to explore powerful dynamics of race, gender and class that were revealed as students moved through the campus landscape and were engaged with the places and spaces of the university’s landscape.

By transgressing a landscape that embodied white privilege with individuals who are constructed by that landscape as different –even as outsiders - the first author was able to subtly gauge the interactions of those students and faculty who were not part of the focus group, but were a critical part of the landscape nonetheless. For example, it is one thing to hear about a fraternity with the giant confederate flag<sup>3</sup> on the front porch and the reactions of the students - but another thing entirely to walk by the house and feel the tension among the African American students in the focus group mount and to wonder what it would have been like if the first author (who is white) had not been a part of the group. By consciously bringing individuals and

groups that are out of place into contact, the three-way engagement to which Moles (2008) refers takes on added significance through a complex and multi-faceted dialog. Academics –participants in a pervasively “white” enterprise - may find that roving focus groups make more immediate and personal the socio-spatial processes of whiteness and racialization. It also allows for greater researcher reflexivity while enhancing the ability to represent research participants’ stories and experiences more fully.

A “roving focus group” fosters a collective reflexivity on landscape and socio-spatial processes that static-location interview or focus groups cannot. They pinpoint particular locations, people, and sites in the landscape that reflect, reify, and/or reproduce social processes such as racialization, and help us to understand how people navigate them. Our research on racialization demonstrates that roving focus groups allow for critical engagement with landscapes, interrogating ways that particular spaces and places can be alienating or exclusive (a point made in Burgess 1996 in relation to fear of others). Research engagements with the landscape do not always produce positive connections with one’s environment; rather, the method may highlight the negative, difficult to overcome sedimented exclusions of some spaces. This insight suggests another possible avenue of inquiry that is under-utilized in more formal qualitative research settings. Namely that for those engaged in critical research, the act of transgressing certain spaces through the research process has the potential to have political significance while simultaneously drawing out a more complex engagement with the landscape. This idea points to possible future research directions that employ walking, and is one of the myriad potentials that walking as research praxis has to not only illuminate deeply entrenched identity positions, but to contribute to the transformation of space.

<sup>1</sup>For a larger discussion of the roving focus group see Inwood and Martin (2008, pp 378-383).

<sup>2</sup>Cresswell (1996) discusses and elaborates these concepts of “in/out of place”.

<sup>3</sup>The confederate flag was the flag of the Confederate States of America, against whom the (remaining) United States fought (successfully) in the civil war of 1861-1865.

It remains a common and contested symbol of identity in those southern states and is often associated with white supremacist groups and ideologies (e.g Hauge et al. 2008).

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# Toy tours: reflections on walking-whilst-talking with young children at home

Olivia Stevenson

Claire Adey

## Introduction

Mobile research methods seek to observe “directly or in digitally enhanced forms mobile bodies undergoing various performances of travel, work, and play” (Sheller and Urry 2006: 217). In recent years a small, but growing, number of academics have begun to use ‘walking interviews’ as a legitimate mobile method (cf. Ricketts Hein et al. 2008; Lorimer 2003a, b; Lorimer and Lund 2003; Pink 2007) to reflect “the core ... realisation that the mobility of walking within particular environments allows for the creation of meaning. By walking people are able to connect times and places through the grounded experience of their material environment” (Moles 2008: 2). Much of the research focus to date has been on utilising mobile methods such as walking interviews in outside space with young people or adults (cf. Wylie 2005; Lashua et al. 2006; Pink 2007; Moles 2008; Murray 2009; Ross et al. 2009). Participants choose the route that they and the researcher take, which means that the researcher and researched are able to work collaboratively in a flexible format and tease out people’s embedded constructions of their socio-spatial worlds (Anderson 2004). Yet, “mobility is spatially and socially uneven” (Murray 2009). Very young children, in particular, experience restricted spatial practices as they tend to spend a lot of time in the supervised space of the home with adults, and thus are not free to experience mobility independently (cf. Stevenson forthcoming). Therefore ethnographic approaches in naturalistic settings (participant observation, creative exercises and key informant interviews) have dominated the research (cf. Thorne 1993; Pellegrini 1996; Corsaro and Molinari 2000; Plowman and Stephen 2005). This is particularly the case when studying children’s life worlds. One such approach for preschool children, which used a mix of methods, has been developed in the Mosaic Model (Clark and Moss 2001). However, unlike other studies the Mosaic approach included young children giving tours of their preschool setting to researchers. Moss and Clark

(2001) argue that the tours were a less ‘sterile’ way to seek children’s perspectives on their environments than the fixed interview room would offer. Whilst valuable, this model has been employed predominantly in preschool settings rather than the home. This poses a unique set of issues around the use of mobile methods in homes with very young children who have, so far, been overlooked by the mobile research literature.

We address this by focusing on the small-scale mobilities of three- to five-year-old children to better understand children’s everyday life worlds at home. The data were collected for the ESRC-funded research project *Young children learning with toys and technology at home*<sup>1</sup>. Over the last 16 months we have visited three- to five-year-old children at home to find out about the role of play in their lives and how this intersects with toys and the domestic, leisure and work technologies that surround them. We visited 14 families between 6 and 9 times each and our visits have drawn on interviews, conversations, observation, mobile phone diaries, video and toy tours to describe children’s play with a range of resources.

We describe here the ‘toy tours’ and the reflective accounts developed through visual methods, observations and the walking-whilst-talking toy tours. It is these toy tours that our paper will focus on as a way to explore the use of this method in generating meaningful understandings of preschool children’s everyday lives.

## Toy tours as a walking-whilst-talking mobile method

The toy tours took place during our second visit to the children’s homes. They typically involved researchers walking around the family home with our target child chatting about and documenting the toys that the children had by making lists and taking photographs, although we did not audio record the conversation. At the same time our target child took photographs, using a digital camera,

of their favourite things and/or places. Through walking as a methodological practice with children in their homes, this provided the opportunity for both researchers and children to engage with the environment in non-static ways, enabling encounters with the material and non material worlds that preschool children inhabit, which often go unrecognised.

## Toy tours in action

Most accounts of walking-whilst-talking methods refer to one-to-one interactions between the researched and the researcher. When working in people’s homes this is often not possible, especially when involving young children, so the toy tours involved not only the focal child, but usually their siblings and/or parents too. Whilst undoubtedly this will have changed the research dynamic, the toy tours did generate the potential for free-flowing conversation. Not only did the participants draw our attention to certain toys or licensed characters, wider family practices were also highlighted. For example:

*During the toy tour with the Henderson’s, we did not recognise the Disney characters on Ruby’s bedroom walls. Ruby told us who they were and Ruby’s mum added that she had not recognised all the characters either and had looked them up on the Internet.*

(Henderson family, field notes, July 2008)

By walking-whilst-talking around the house with the Henderson family we were permitted to enter into a particular narrative that we might not have been privy to had the conversation been held in a fixed location. This exchange highlighted how children have cultural knowledge other than that of their parents, which at times encouraged some parents to seek out information that they might otherwise not have.

The spontaneous interactions and play episodes that occurred during the toy

tours added richness to the research encounter that more static methods might not have facilitated. For example:

*Upon entering the toy room Jasmine picked up her toy laptop and began to use the mouse as a telephone. Jasmine pushed a button on the laptop to make a noise like a telephone ringing and pretended to have a conversation with her boyfriend. Jasmine's mother laughed and commented that her daughter always did this despite having been told that this is not what the mouse is for.*

(Searl family, field notes, July 2008)

This example shows how the methodological practice of walking-whilst-talking enabled the 'moment-ness' (Latham 2003) of participants' interactions with the material objects that form part of their embodied play practice to be explored and experienced both by the participants and the researchers, albeit differently. This opened up space for us, as the researchers, to follow the here and now, rather than rely on participants past memories and constructions of events.

By asking children to walk us around their homes, we were able to build rapport, making the walking-whilst-talking tour less formal yet focused specifically on the familiar environment under investigation. Both the informal and situated nature of the research encounter provided children with the opportunity to ask researchers to help them; for example to take animals out of cages, go into the garage for toys or get arts and crafts things down, even though there were temporal and spatial rules attached to these requests:

*Some of Rachel's toys were kept in the garage, which she could not access without her parents' permission. Rachel frequently asked us to go into the garage and fetch toys for her, which through observations and conversations with her parents we knew to be contravening the rules of the house.*

(O'Dare family, field notes, July 2008)

Similarly, throughout the walking-whilst-talking toy tours children took the opportunity of another adult's presence to ask parents if they could do certain activities:

*Katie pointed out some of her*

*videos which were kept in the living room. As she did Katie asked her mother if she could put one on, to which her mother replied: "No, you know you don't have the television on when there are visitors".*

(Simpson family, field notes, August 2008)

Through the use of the walking-whilst-talking method it is possible to gain insight into the ways that rules operate at both a spatial and temporal level and how the presence of others, such as researchers, disrupts the ways that young children ordinarily experience the home-space. Insights, such as these offered in the toy tours with Rachel or Katie, might not have been gleaned from more structured interviews - as with all the younger participants involved in the study, direct questioning provided scant response.

For some children, whilst they appeared happy to participate in the toy tours they did not offer any commentary about their toys; rather they took the opportunity to involve researchers in their activities.

*Kelly willingly took photos of her toys, but rather than providing any commentary about them Kelly instead included us in helping her to carry things for the picnic she was in the process of setting up; looking at us she silently handed us toy picnic objects and pointed out where she wanted them to go.*

(Fletcher family, field notes, July 2008)

The lack of direct questioning from the researchers allowed detailed observation of how Kelly enacted imaginary play, yet a fuller explanation around the significance of the tea set or Kelly's other toys that we recorded remained only partially revealed. Although we were able to watch Kelly play in situ we were still unsure about the significance of these objects for Kelly or how they contributed to her everyday place-making practices. What is clear though is the multitude of ways that children view adults and how the researched and researchers positioning in the toy tours is derived through constant forms of negotiation, rather than being fixed.

Finally, there were ethical dilemmas faced by researchers during the use of mobile methods in these family homes.

For example, whose rights should be respected and what role(s) should a researcher take when doing walking tours in people's homes where the power relations are multiple and differential? This came to the fore when visiting the Bain family:

*The Bain children took us around their home unaccompanied by their parents. It transpired through conversation that Arden Bain kept various parts of his dressing up clothes in his parents' bedroom. During the toy tours Arden was keen to show us this space and how he used it for play. However, we knew that Mrs Bain did not want us to see inside this room.*

(Bain family, field notes, July 2008)

On this occasion the researchers imposed constraints on the route taken around the house and tried to redirect the location of the discussion, thus cutting off the opportunity for Arden to develop this conversation further and show how he occupied this space. However, although one route was closed an alternative was opened as Arden and the researchers experienced how the different voices of the household are negotiated and how some places are open to all, whereas some are closed depending upon perceived positions as 'insiders' or 'outsiders'.

## Conclusion

The toy tours situated research encounters in the everyday locales of the participants, in this case their homes, which for preschool children is typically a place where they spend a large proportion of their time. The toy tours allowed a deeper understanding of the ways that homes were organised and the spontaneous use of toys by the children. The sharing of narratives from the mundane to the intimate and significant, as well as the rhythm of the toy tour created a "context through which young people could pace the sharing of narratives" (Ross et al. 2009: 614). Further, the taking of photos, the researcher recording the toys children had, the children's desire to play rather than move on to the next room, door bells and phones ringing, dogs refusing to go outside, children fighting with their siblings - "provided both stimulus for, and interruptions and disruptions to, interactions" (Ross et al. 2009: 615). Therefore the rich data generated, allowed for the

multifaceted connections between people, place, material and non-material worlds that contribute to the geographies that preschool children and their families make every day to be brought to the fore. However, unlike other studies that cite mobile methods as “key to creating a context in which young people could talk freely about their everyday lives” (Ross et al. 2009: 613), the toy tours involved not only the focal child, but usually their siblings and/or parents too. Consequently, the time and space for young children to generate data on their own terms is not as free from constraint as other studies suggest. Not only this, but the existing routes and rules of the house meant on occasion that children were not able to move through their homes as they would like. Thus, the physical arrangement of the home-space and the social practices that take place in this location can either mobilise or restrict children’s place-making, which cannot purely be overcome through the use of mobile methods. In sum, the act of walking with young children around their homes looking at their toys gave space to the multi sensory experience of children’s lives at home. Conversation, taking photos of toys, children (semi)choosing the routes around their homes, displaying how toys could be used and ignored and the places that toys were kept allowed glimpses of family practices set in the wider context of everyday talk about toys. As a result of the toy tours insights were given into how families order homes and children’s practices, the ways that both parents and children exercise power and negotiate social relationships within home spaces and how often within family research this is a spontaneous and unpredictable process.

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# Walking with Andrei in Swansea, or going where the paths take me...

Keith Halfacree

“To question the habitual. But that’s just it, we’re habituated to it. ... What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, *our rhythms*” (Georges Perec 1999: 210, my emphasis)

This paper is about walking as both practice and potential method. It originates not in a research project but in the less routine walking that, on a near-daily basis, involved myself, a pram and my son Andrei in the year following his birth in September 2003.

Like Georges Perec, social scientists have in recent years become increasingly interested in the more mundane aspects of everyday life (e.g. Holloway and Hubbard 2001). One aspect of this fascination is to demonstrate, first, how it is typically highly routinised and, second, how these routines can perform, state and reproduce key structures of contemporary society. Consequently, although routines should not be understood as being so firmly structured as to exclude a degree of everyday evolution and transgression, the breaking of routines has transformative potential. For the individual, this can offer new insights into supposedly ‘known’ places and facilitate critical thought and reflection that can sometimes be individually transformative.

## Routine walking

Walking is a key element within many of the routine activities of most of us but with different walking styles associated with specific tasks and their associated space-times. For example, consider how one’s bodily deportment varies, the extent to which the walk itself is taken-for-granted or more reflected upon, the affective experiences of the activity, or the different levels of sociality involved, that are usually caught up in the following types of walking that I engage with more or less regularly:

- Going to the corner shop for milk or the paper;
- Travelling with friends to and between pubs on a Saturday night;

- Taking a Sunday stroll with the family or to walk off that hang-over;
- Shooting off to the photocopier to get the journal article just printed;
- Coming home late at night through a ‘risky’ area, such as a park;
- Following a long-distance footpath for pleasure.

Recognising this routine yet differentiated character of much of our walking allows brief critical reflection on associations made between walking and ‘radical’ practice. This is represented from de Certeau’s (1984) seminal ‘walking in the city’, where walking facilitates development of a more autonomous and empowering subjective reading of the city than a distanced and representational ‘view from above’, to Solnit’s (2001) celebration of ‘wanderlust’ (see below). It is also apparent in more explicitly activist material, where human-scale movement, ‘the mind at three miles an hour’ (Solnit 2001: 14), has become a metaphor for how an anarchist-inspired movement should constantly evolve: ‘Rather than seeking a map to tomorrow, we are developing our own journeys, individually and collectively, as we travel’ (Notes from Nowhere 2003: 506).

This connection is alluring and exciting. However, it is important that all kinds of walking are not somehow seen as equal or even just disaggregated into a range of styles as already suggested. Neither is walking’s supposed ability to be somehow integrative for the individual, expressed by all these contributions, its **only** potentially ‘radical’ input. For example, Solnit (2001: 9) argues that, in contrast to the disconnected spaces that comprise much of daily life, ‘On foot everything stays connected’. Seen in the context of the routines of everyday life, this suggests walking **re-inscribing** routines. Fine if we are content to see walking as providing space for critical thought (Solnit 2001: 5), but less ‘radical’ if one of our tasks is also to question and challenge many of the routines of everyday life with which walking is so closely implicated. What happens, though, when walking fleetingly be-

comes less routine? Or, as the Exeter-based *Mis-Guides* (2006: back cover) advocate, when we engage more ‘disruptive walking’?

## Less routine walking... with Andrei

The most celebrated group to embrace less routine walking were the Situationists, who promoted the *dérive*, ‘a... free-form but critical drift through urban terrain’ (Pinder 1996: 416). They thought this could shake out some of the assumptions contained within the routines of daily life so as to reveal urban space in novel ways, to tap into the *psychogeographic* resonances of the city, the emotional and behavioural feel of the urban environment. It is a cause pursued still through psychogeography and taken up recently by the aforementioned *Mis-Guides* (2006), for example.

However, less routine walking can also occur less intentionally, not least when something about the potential walking environment – (an) element(s) of its *affordances* (Gibson 1986) – pulls the walker in. For this to occur, the walker has to be both open to such an allure – having time and suitable ‘equipment’ – and to not be distracted by others wanting her or him to go somewhere else. Walking a baby, especially one asleep in a robust pram, fits the bill well.

The city of Swansea is blessed with a large number of environments ideal for baby walking. Besides the coastal path, there are numerous large public parks. Many of the latter were within easy walking distance of our house. I even christened one of my walks the ‘Four Parks Walk’. This walk seems a bit unusual in hindsight, conjoining four parks unlikely to feature in any other single urban walk within Swansea, except perhaps one guided by the *Mis-Guides*.

The majority of my walks with Andrei took place in the streets and parks around our house in the western Brynmill district of Swansea, next to the University. Usually they were centred on a park but both getting there and back, and other demands, such as shopping for small items, often took me through mainly residential streets.

From the start, the walks felt somehow ‘different’. Although often having a target, such as Cwmdonkin Park, the Coast Path or Singleton Park, how long it took to get there, how long spent there, even getting there at all, did not really matter. This made the experience fundamentally different from most routine walking, where a definite place goal is usually paramount. Moreover, the sense of walking whilst pushing a pram was novel in other ways, with the need to be aware of, for example, kerbs, small potholes, other pavement users, the width of the paths, etc. being more immediate than for me as solo walker. Thirdly, a sense of having time to pause and ‘stand and stare’ – even sit down – also struck me as novel, usually being associated with explicitly leisure-orientated walking. I became, as I wrote in my notebook, ‘a different kind of flâneur’ (Baudelaire, see Benjamin 1983).

Within the walks themselves, I soon found myself going to places rarely or even never been to before within my neighbourhood, in spite of being a keen walker and having lived in the area since October 1991. It was as if I relinquished some walking agency to the paths and other opportunities that had opened themselves up to me. In other words, newly activated affordances did their work and the paths drew me in. In particular, new routes opened themselves to

me and the back alleys of streets – still commonplace within Swansea – became enticing walking sites.

As I went through new or at least differently appreciated routes, a variety of overlapping themes struck me, insights into both the temporal and spatial structure of Swansea all too easily excised or missed from normal routinised walking. There is not space to detail these but Table 1 below notes some.

Overall, my experiences echoed Edensor’s (2008) recognition of the ‘mundane hauntings’ of the places he passed through on his daily car commute in Manchester. Particularly in mundane spaces such as alleyways, ‘the past is less likely to be entirely dispersed of, polished away or obliterated’ (p.326) and we see revealed ‘traces of previous material forms, cultural practices, inhabitants, politics, ways of thinking and being, and modes of experience’ (p.315). However, not just ghosts of the past came through in my walks but also a heightened sense of difference within the existing urban order, a diversity easily excised from the often blanked-out, semi-narcotised and flattened spaces of everyday routine.

#### Less routine walking and the theory of moments

Reacting against the idea of time as linear duration and inspired by Surrealist

and Dadaist interventions, Henri Lefebvre developed a *theory of moments* that suggested a more discontinuous and impassioned sense of time and individual history. In brief, he saw the mundane temporality of everyday life frequently punctured by moments of intense epiphany – ‘lived **content**’ (Lefebvre 1961/2002: 341) – which we call love, anger, frustration, poetry, surprise, etc. For example, the moment of love is that intense moment of emotion and clarity when the rest of everyday life melts away. It is only fleeting before it sinks back into the confused ordinariness of everyday life, where moments ‘lie shrouded, buried, at one and the same time mingled together and separated’ (Lefebvre 1959/2003: 172), but it reveals with intense clarity one aspect of life. Put in terms used above, the moment signifies a breaking out from the routine that allows us to see what is ‘within’ the routine but hidden by its routineness.

Of course, my breaking of routines as told in this paper hardly attained the lucid intensity of the Lefebvrian moment. However, perhaps the theory can be humbled or expanded (*sic*) to suggest how breaks in the everyday more generally can allow novel, reflective perspectives on the taken-for-granted to emerge, albeit fleetingly. Building on this point, my walks with our other son, Luca (b.2006), were very different to those

**Table 1: Themes Emerging from my Less Routine Walks**

Theme	Illustration(s)
Alternative economic geographies	- small businesses, old and new, hidden down alleyways - car boot sales
Absent encounters	- discarded rucksack in fair condition: result of crime or another story to tell? - fading graffiti
Backside of studentification	- squalid backyards of student houses: profit over community
Rhythms of the city	- cars, cars, cars: automobility, even ‘autodependency’? - questioned by journalist surveying use of Brynmill Park - park usage time-spaces – dog walkers, craft fairs, children, etc.
Hidden trails	- ‘other’ routes within Singleton Park: secret places for schoolchildren to smoke, drink, love - the ‘40-minute circuit’ I created around this same park
New sensations	- ‘click click’ of pram wheels on drains across pavements - potholes, kerbs and other obstacles easily navigated when solo - limit to pram accessibility: ‘one path too far for Andrei’ – the ‘unknown’
Sense of place	- learning the sequence of Uplands street names - craft fair, carol singing, teenage rock band (‘vocal mike knackered’ but trying anyway), art installations in Brynmill Park, etc.

(Source: from notes taken on the walks)

taken with Andrei in his pram. First, Luca did not sleep so much, with his awakened agency having a significant impact on where I went. Second, Andrei was also usually with us and the paths – affordances beckoning or not – exerted far less control than ‘Daddy, can we go to the playground?’!

In conclusion, this paper has sought to demonstrate how what I have characterised as a set of less routine walking experiences engaged with the everyday geographies of the city. This was less through walking helping to weave together the city, as de Certeau (1984) suggested, but more through affordance-facilitated less routine walking providing a momentary revelatory opening-up and exposure of the diverse make up of the contemporary urban order. Such is a way in which walking can, therefore, question the habitual.

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# ‘The leaves beneath my feet’: comparing children’s descriptions of their journey to school by travel mode

Mark McGuinness

### Introduction

The journey to school is a daily ritual for millions of families. This form of everyday mobility gives shape to most children’s and their parent’s daily routines. Concerns over sedentary lifestyles, traffic congestion and environmental degradation have brought this rather mundane and commonplace travel behaviour into recent academic and policy focus. Among primary school children, my focus here, just over one half (52%) of journeys are still made on foot. (DfT 2008). However, concern arises from the fact that the number of journeys made by children in motor vehicles has doubled in the last two decades. Forty-one percent of primary school children are now ferried to and from school in motor vehicles (DfT 2008). The UK’s Department for Transport consistently estimates around one in five vehicles on the road in the morning peak times to be

related to a school run (DfT, 2006). This increases peak journey times for all road users and, crucially, increases parental perceptions of risk, as these journeys increase the theoretical and actual traffic danger to children around their school locations.

In contrast to these often quantitative studies, there has been a recent and by now sustained interest in the social and individual impacts of this change in travel behaviour, with studies variously examining children’s independence (e.g. Kearns *et al* 2003; Mackett *et al* 2007), risk (e.g. Jenkins 2006; Murray 2009) and health (Department of Health 2009; Sustrans 2009). The purpose of this paper is to report empirical findings from one aspect of a qualitative study designed to examine the relationship between travel mode and children’s descriptions of environment and place.

### Methodology

Mainstream studies of transport and travel prioritise quantitative measures of distance and categorisation of trip purpose. This research adopted a distinctly qualitative approach seeking to place children’s descriptions at the centre of activities which encouraged children to describe and recollect features of significance to them in their ‘travel worlds’. Usual travel mode was recorded in order to enable categorisation and comparison.

The study took place in two primary schools in the Bristol-Bath area, one urban in character and quite typical of state primary schools; the other school was a successful, sought after church school set in a leafy suburb. The findings reported here derive from activities undertaken with two classes at year 6 (age 10–11). Head teachers in each school

nominated a 'good group' to work with, one in each school. Tasks were embedded into the normal delivery of the Geography Key Stage 2 curriculum. The research activities took place in the autumn term and the general weather conditions during the three weeks of the research were predominantly pleasant, sunny days, with unseasonably cold mornings in one week. Fifty-three participants contributed to the research, and parental/carer consent was sought and obtained for each participant.

Many of the activities adopted visual methodologies, producing mental maps of children's communities and maintaining photographic diaries of travel experiences during a set period of time (Rose, 2007; Laurier & Brown, 2008). The aspect reported on here, however, presumed that if experience of place was more immediate and multi-sensory whilst walking, then an opportunity for children to reflect on these journeys in visual and extra-visual ways was important. The workshops undertaken in this part of the project thus worked with participants to encourage them to reconstruct a wider sensory recollection of their daily journeys, encompassing sound, touch and smell as well as sight. Data were captured via individually completed worksheets that were completed following classroom discussion.

This extra-visual aspect was, predictably perhaps, the most challenging aspect of the research. Children's sensory hierarchy is, like those of adults, in a complex relationship with wider socio-cultural processes that, as Paterson (2007) argues, prioritises the visual. Participants readily grasped the remit and purpose of tasks when considering visual reconstructions. However, when asked about what things they might touch, smell or hear, their recollections were decidedly less immediate – 'what do you mean?' was a common response. Small group work, examining the sonic environment of the school, or the haptic environment of meal times were designed to help children understand the remit more fully.

### Children's descriptions of their journeys

Participants, whether they usually walked or were driven to school, were able to recollect plentiful key features of their environment. Predictably, other schools, hospitals, roundabouts and crossing points featured in responses from all groups. Perhaps more surprisingly, features associated with the facilitation of

car travel – especially petrol stations and road bridges – were equally noted by both walkers and passengers as significant 'punctuation marks' in their journeys. For example:

*I see the Hospital, Tesco Esso garage, church, houses, old peoples' home, cars (car passenger)*  
*I see cars, bridge, trees, nettles, A36, railway (walker)*  
*I can see shops, Esso garage, buses, houses, cars, hills and a park (walker)*

These were usually episodic descriptions and were, generally, consistent with the journey itineraries and maps recorded elsewhere in the project, demonstrating an authenticity of account and permitting a reasonable degree of confidence in the accuracy of journey narration. However, there was an interesting tendency among those who usually walked to school to cite a much greater depth of knowledge of their locality:

*I see herons, kingfishers, river, roads, Georgian buildings, ducks, swans, signets [sic], boats, Café Uno, Pulteney Bridge, Sydney Gardens*  
*I usually see the Enterprise Pub, Parson Street school, The Miners Arms, pet shop and Alphabet Zoo*  
*I can see cars, [the Clifton] suspension bridge, trees, church, people, park, post office*

This compares with typical descriptions from the car passengers, such as:

*I see cars, trees, flowers, road, traffic, traffic lights, people*  
*I see lots of cars, trees, people, buildings, signposts, traffic lights*

Those who walked were more likely to be better able to name streets and buildings, as well as offering a greater amount of micro-level detail to illustrate their descriptions of place. These differing levels of detail about localities were consistent across the sample.

Having worked with participants to 'open up' their sensory recollections, it was refreshing to see a good level of detail emerge from the descriptions offered by both travel mode groups. The enclosed, more controlled environment inside the car might lead to assumptions of a stultified or limited ability to describe their environment. As we see below, the scale of description is, as we

might expect, somewhat more limited; however, the eye for detail is nonetheless evident:

*I can see the back of a car seat.*  
*I hear the beeping of horns, arguing, chatter, leaves, ringtones, animals, people building, wind, traffic.*  
*I always hear the radio, my mum singing, traffic.*  
*I smell the car's air fresheners and car fumes.*  
*I smell salami, which I eat in the car.*  
*I can feel the leather seats, my sister's hand.*  
*I touch my clothes when I sit with my hands in my lap.*  
*I touch my phone, GameBoy SP, the windows.*

Those who walked to school, traversing environments open to the elements and with more opportunity to interact with features encountered on the route described their immediate environments in far more varied and richer detail, for example:

*I see the flowers in my garden and see the leaves beneath my feet [and] the fallen apples on the ground.*  
*I can hear the sound of my trousers rubbing together.*  
*I hear birds call and the crickets chirp. I hear the wind, the leaves and the sounds of shouting in the playground.*  
*I hear birds tweeting, cats meowing/purring, the thud as I walk along, chatting.*  
*I smell car fumes, dogs mess, cigarette smoke, beer, dustbin lorries smell.*  
*I touch cat fur, leaves, brick walls, my backpack, my mobile, my lunch box, the school gates.*

Both walkers and car passengers described in broadly equal measure the smells and sounds of the usual traffic congestion on their journey to and from school. However, the key difference, as evidenced above is the richer sensory environment upon which walkers draw when describing their world, compared to the more predictable and controlled environment described by the car passengers.

### Discussion: the complexities of children's travel worlds

This research confirms that children's

travel worlds are complex outcomes of myriad discourses of risk, opportunity, parental choice as well as the product of parental negotiations over children's autonomy and real or perceived time-poverty (Murray, 2010). However the data suggest that, in general, those who walked were able to talk at some length and record their journeys at more extensive levels of detail compared to those who were car passengers. This is consistent with data elsewhere in the project, walkers being impressively able to pinpoint and map individual landmarks such as a friend's house or favoured play space. The walkers were much more likely to be able to accurately map their different home/travel/school/play environments through the mental mapping activities or the more conventional Ordnance Survey maps that the classroom sessions began with. The car passengers, on the other hand, found this task much more difficult, perhaps unsurprising given the lack of autonomy over route choice, the speed of travel and the relatively constrained view to be had from the car window.

Discussion revealed that it was not a simple case of these latter participants *lacking* a sense of spatial configuration, but more a case of the distances involved making it much more difficult for these home/school/play worlds actually to fit together as children lived in entirely different communities outside of school time. My detailed preprinted maps of the school locality and environs often didn't extend far enough for these participants to be able to map their routes, many being dropped off at school having already travelled several miles, some even travelling in from a neighbouring county.

Those participants who walked to school were more likely to offer vivid and varied descriptions of their travel worlds than their colleagues in cars. Clearly the additional time and opportunity to encounter the unexpected made possible through a walking journey offers quantitatively and qualitatively different opportunities (a friendly cat, the feel of a wall, the sound and feel of leaves underfoot) than the more predictable and controlled experiences had by those passing by in 'Mum's Taxi'. Of course the controlled nature of the car passenger experience is precisely the attraction for parents concerned about safety or those who are time-poor. The research does suggest that walking journeys to school could be considered a potentially valuable (not-quite) extra-curricular opportunity to

develop creative and imaginative skills as well as the daily opportunity for the kinds of unpredictable social interactions envisaged in DfT's (2004) *Walking and Cycling Action Plan*. In conclusion, the qualitative differences in the nature and extent of environmental description offered by those experiencing different travel modes here confirms the inextricable links between mobility and place construction and the need for further investigation.

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## Upcoming WISERD Events

WISERD will be delivering a range of training workshops over the coming year covering various topics including Data Management, Locating and Using Data Resources in Wales, Quantitative Methods for Qualitative Researchers and Multimodal Qualitative Research. Details of these workshops can be found on the website: <http://www.wiserd.ac.uk>

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The conference will be of particular interest to academics and policy makers from across Wales with a wide range of subjects covered including transport, housing and economic regeneration. The keynote speakers include John McGrath; Director of the National Theatre Wales.

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### The 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

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### 8th International Qualitative Research Conference

6-8 September 2010

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The Centre for Qualitative Research at Bournemouth University is pleased to announce its biennial conference to be held from the 6 to the 8 September 2010 at Bournemouth University, Talbot Campus. Key note speakers include; Immy Holloway (Bournemouth University), Janice Morse

(University of Utah, USA), Monica Prendergast (Lesley University, USA) and Nigel Rapport (University of St Andrews) <http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk:80/hsc/international-qualitative-research-conference-2010.html>

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<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/events/vital/signs/>

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