

## **Urban walking experience, understood as relationships between the pedestrian's inner world, the city they experience and their physical movement of walking.**

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### **Abstract**

There is growing interest in walking and how it can be encouraged due to its potential to ameliorate public health, environmental and congestion issues and the economic benefits attendant on this. However there is little research about the experience of urban walking. This paper brings new insight into this experience. Data generated through 31 in-depth qualitative interviews yielded a simple concept, rich in implications. This is that the urban walking experience can partly be understood as triangular interactions between three factors: the inner world of the pedestrian, the outer city they experience and the physical movement of walking itself. The interactions between these can have cognitive, imaginative and emotional aspects.

The paper will develop and explain two features of this triangle of interactions. Findings demonstrate how the inner world of the pedestrian and the city they experience can be related in a number of different ways through the thoughts of the pedestrian: at times the pedestrian can be lost in personal reflection or daydreaming and hardly notice their surroundings at all. At other times features in the city trigger enjoyable trains of thought and emotional states in the pedestrian. Alternatively, the city contains elements that threaten and interrupt the inner life of the pedestrian, reducing some of their walk's experiential potential. The physical movement of walking itself is seen to be often unconscious, often acting as an 'unobtrusive party host' introducing the pedestrian to experiences besides itself. Thus using qualitative evidence the paper will elucidate theoretical insights into urban walking. Indications will be given of implications for policy and further research.

### **Introduction**

Walking is an important mode of transport that benefits society and the individual. Firstly, at the level of a sustainable society, walking is important in its potential for replacing car trips. By so doing it can help alleviate the problems of CO2 emissions (European Federation for Transport and Environment, 2009), traffic congestion (West of England Partnership, 2006,) injury or death from collisions (DfT 2010) and the breakdown of streets as social spaces (Hamilton-Baillie, 2008). Secondly, walking has also been seen to have benefits at the level of local communities: It is an option available to people of all incomes and social groups and has been cited as a marker of civilised society (Penolosa, cited in Lo, 2009, p.161). Higher levels of walking can lead to greater feelings of community cohesion and urban vibrancy, to the extent that it has been suggested that those who walk 'create' a city (DeCerteau, 1984, cited in Bean et al., 2008, p.2834). Thirdly, at the level of the individual, walking can have multi-faceted benefits; in terms of physical health, mental well-being and experiential aspects. The physical activity of walking (Health Education Authority 2000) can reduce the risk of a number of diseases, including heart disease, stroke and others. It can also help reduce the risk of obesity.

Given that walking has such broad social and individual benefits, the research that this paper is based upon aimed to generate new evidence about the actual experience of walking in the

urban context in order to stimulate discussion about the value of walking to the individual and how it can be better accommodated. The experience of urban walking has prompted some theoretical debates (e.g. Taylor, 2003), but there is little research based on empirical evidence. It is likely that this lack of evidence is related to the fact that most urban journeys are considered through an economic framing of reaching destinations in the most time efficient way. Experience is more associated with leisure trips, and therefore there has been more consideration of the experience of walking for leisure in rural settings.

It is important to understand the essence of the urban walking experience, as once understood, it can be sensitively addressed in the design of urban environments, and can also be promoted. In addition the wider importance of the experience within society can be understood. Comprehending the experiential aspects of walking can in part be justified by the reasoning that experiences are generally important to human existence: They can be given as gifts (Carter & Gilovich, 2012) can be used to market goods by association (Schmitt, 1999) can be used by businesses (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), can constitute art and have even been suggested to be a useful indicator of a nation's success (New Economic Foundation, 2009).

To demonstrate the importance of detailed understanding of the urban walking experience this paper takes two themes from the original research conducted for a PhD thesis. These are the unobtrusiveness of the physical act of walking and the variety of different relationships between the thoughts of urban pedestrians and the city environments in which they walk. Through these two elements this paper will argue that urban walking experience goes beyond aesthetic appreciation of the walking environment. In the next two sections the paper presents the contextual thinking that is taken forward in the analysis of the data. The paper then summarises the research design before discussing the findings associated with the two themes. The conclusions demonstrate the relevance for the academic understanding of walking, and for areas of policy of the themes explored. To begin, the physical aspect of walking will be discussed.

### **Is the physical aspect of walking unobtrusive?**

How aware people are of each physical step they make is debatable. Evidence can be found in literature both for and against the proposition that walkers tend to be aware of their bodily movement while walking. Starting with evidence indicating awareness, a few papers have focused specifically on aspects of the walking body, such as legs and feet (Ingold 2004) and gait (Gross et al. 2012). Gross et al. draw attention towards bodily aspects of walking through studying the associations between different types of movements of the walking body and different emotions. These studies are examples of academics focusing on the walking body, but they do not necessarily imply that walkers themselves focus on it.

Auto-ethnographic accounts of walking take a step nearer to suggesting a reflexive awareness of the walking body. Wylie's (2005, p.239) account of walking a coastal path includes comments on his awareness of his own moving body. At one point for instance he narrates crossing a stream, paying attention to the placing of his feet and ascending an embankment. However, Wylie is an academic purposely reflecting on the act to explore theoretical ideas about the body and non-representational theory.

Reflexive awareness of the walking body has also been championed in historical traditions concerning rural walking (Edensor, 2000, p.96). Edensor suggests that in such traditions, 'the body in nature is conceived as healthier and fitter and thus more able to sense and to feel, to be more aware of itself and its 'natural' propensities'. The idea here is that walking increases an awareness of the body, the aim of this awareness can be to enjoy increased ability to 'sense and feel.' Another aim for paying attention to the walking body can be to improve posture and gait. Thus Edensor (2000) notes some writings have prescribed a detailed method for how the rural walker should move their body.

When walking in the countryside, times of specific challenge can lead to particular awareness of the body (Edensor, 2000, p.101). These might be times when the walker suffers headaches, 'muscle fatigue' and blisters etc. as well as the eventualities of navigating 'barbed wire', cowpats and climbing over fences (see also Wiley 2005). In addition the

changing qualities of ground underfoot can draw the attention of the rural walker to their balance.

So then there is a strand in literature of people being aware of the body as they walk. However, both Wylie (2005) and Edensor (2000) deal with rural walking. It is not necessarily the case that urban walking would include or prompt a similar awareness of the body. There is very little evidence concerning this issue in the urban context. The research discussed in the later sections seeks to fill this gap.

In contrast there are others who are writing about walking who contend that the bodily movement aspect of walking can go almost unnoticed. Solnit (2001), for instance, repeatedly suggests that walking in itself does not preoccupy the mind. In fact it can be hard to even identify what the experience of walking is. She describes walking as 'the most obvious and the most obscure thing in the world' and 'the something closest to doing nothing', suggesting 'it strikes a delicate balance between working and idling' (Solnit 2001, p.3-5). Such descriptions of walking give the sense that there is something elusive about walking. Solnit's account does not draw on empirical evidence, and there are only hints in other research that support the idea that bodily movement may go unnoticed when walking, particularly in urban areas.

Middleton (2010, p.583) does touch on it, however, with a quote by one of her participants. The participant depicted his bodily movement of walking as largely unconscious. He talked of hardly being aware that he was walking and suggested that his legs just took him to where he was going, without much conscious attention. Middleton analysed her participant's comments in relation to Hubbard's (2006, cited in Middleton, 2010) contention that as the body moves through urban space, the mind does not have to pay conscious attention to the movement. Guell et al. (2012, p.236) also corroborate the idea that the bodily movement of walking can be almost unconscious, noting from Green (2009, p.27) that it can be a 'largely taken for granted accomplishment'.

The ability to walk without conscious awareness of walking could be due to walking being what Merleau Ponty (2002, p.166) categorises as a 'habit'. He gives touch typing as an example of this kind of ability. Someone may well be able to touch type without being able to consciously 'know' where each letter is on the keyboard. In this case it is as if the knowledge of how to type is in the hands, rather than in the conscious mind. Similarly it may be contended that the control of walking may be in the body, and may not always present itself to the conscious mind.

Another way in which the physical aspect of walking may be unobtrusive is in its level of exertion. Darker et al. (2007) report that their participants did not perceive walking as 'proper exercise' (p.2176); instead they saw it as being too easy to be worthwhile as exercise. Although admittedly there are forms of more intensive walking such as power walking, Darker et al. report the perception that walking has limited potential as exercise.

Some have suggested walking is a process which naturally serves to fix our attention on things other than itself. Solnit (2001, p.8), for example, develops an idea taken from Thoreau that walking as a topic 'inevitably leads into other subjects. Walking is a subject that is always straying'. The attention of the walker may turn from their ambulation inwards, into thoughts and ruminations. For instance, walking has been found to be 'an experience which takes one out of the world, and into an inner realm', (Darker et al, 2007, p.2178). Alternatively walking may focus the walker's attention on external interests (e.g. sightseeing, nature, etc.).

It is argued that there is thinking and evidence present in literature which presents two opposing possibilities. The first is that the walker is aware of their body and its movement while walking and the second is that the walker is unaware of these and their awareness is taken up by other things instead. There is slightly more evidence of the first possibility than the second. But little has been written on the topic, especially in relation to urban walking. If the act of walking itself does not take up the pedestrian's attention, it is possible that walking may be a useful time to think about other things, a possibility the paper now addresses.

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## **Urban walking as a time to think**

The potential for walking as a good time for thinking is illustrated by Solnit's exploration of great individuals of history who were keen walkers, such as Rousseau who conducted his elevated levels of thinking only when walking (Solnit 2001). This is in keeping with Edensor's (2000) conclusion that walking has been viewed as leading to high levels of intellectual thought. However, there is also experimental evidence to support the assertion that walking can aid thinking (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014, Berman et al., 2008,) Oppezzo & Schwartz, (2014) found that walking can create superior creative thinking than sitting does, and that walking outside is better in this respect than walking inside.

If walking can be valuable as a time to think then an interesting related question is whether walking might lend itself particularly to specific types of thinking. There is some evidence indicating thinking while walking may include processing and solving general problems, personal reflection and inspirational thinking fed by the unconscious (which can also be called daydreaming).

Walking may be conducive to thinking through problems (Crust et al. 2011, Darker, 2007): Crust et al.'s (2011) long distance leisure walking participants for instance commented on being able to achieve 'clear thinking' about problems while walking that arrived at 'alternative solutions' (p.254). However, there is little empirical evidence to demonstrate that urban walkers undertaking more routine trips similarly use walking to aid problem solving.

Reflection is another form of thinking conducted whilst walking that is evidenced in literature. The walking pilgrimage can be a setting in which walking is used as a 'time-space for reflection' (Maddrell, 2011, p.15). Similarly Crust et al. (2011, p.245) report that their long distance walking participants reported time on their walks being a good time for reflection. Crust et al.'s participants did their reflecting in rural settings and it seems such settings may specifically aid the process. Edensor (2000, p.86) comments that writings about rural walking suggest that the sensations of walking in the countryside 'can free the mind and generate reflexivity, whether through philosophical thinking or aesthetic contemplation.' Edensor (2000, p.86) reports that such reflection has been suggested to lead to 'self restoration, through what has been called the 'walking cure'.

The studies cited above with regard to walking as a time to reflect largely relate to rural walking and Edensor (2000) suggests that achieving effective reflection has been considered difficult in urban settings. So questions are raised of whether such reflection is possible in quotidian urban walking.

Another type of thinking whilst walking that literature touches upon is a type of inspirational thinking, fed by the unconscious, which can include daydreaming. There is a sense that walking might be a time for free, maybe creative or 'blue sky', thinking (Solnit, 2001, Edensor, 2000). There is some experimental evidence to back the conjecture that walking may aid creative thinking (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014). Some scant qualitative empirical evidence is also present of urban walking being a time for inspirational thinking and daydreaming: One of Darker et al.'s (2007, p.2178) participants used walking as a time for her 'mind to wander.' Another of their participants commented that while walking 'Sometimes I am just day-dreaming, which is really fun' (p.2178), but such evidence has not been developed with a more robust study.

It has been suggested that there is some evidence that walking can be particularly conducive for certain types of thinking. However evidence of this in the case of urban walking is scarce and there is no study known to the authors that specifically focuses on urban walking facilitating particular types of thinking.

## **Research design**

The research was designed to explore research questions that probed at the essence of the urban walking experience, as well as the psychological and emotional benefits of the experience. It used a qualitative methodology that was well suited to an open ended and exploratory approach to the topic, which facilitated a depth investigation of people's experiences (Pattern, 2002, p.353). Qualitative research is also helpful when the research is

seeking to make new discoveries and achieve unexpected findings (Hayes, 1997). The research had some phenomenological commitments, suitable to its focus on the essence of an experience. However it could not be called a phenomenological study in the philosophical sense of the word, due to a radical epistemology and phenomenological training of participants that would be required. Data analysis was inductive and data-led and used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

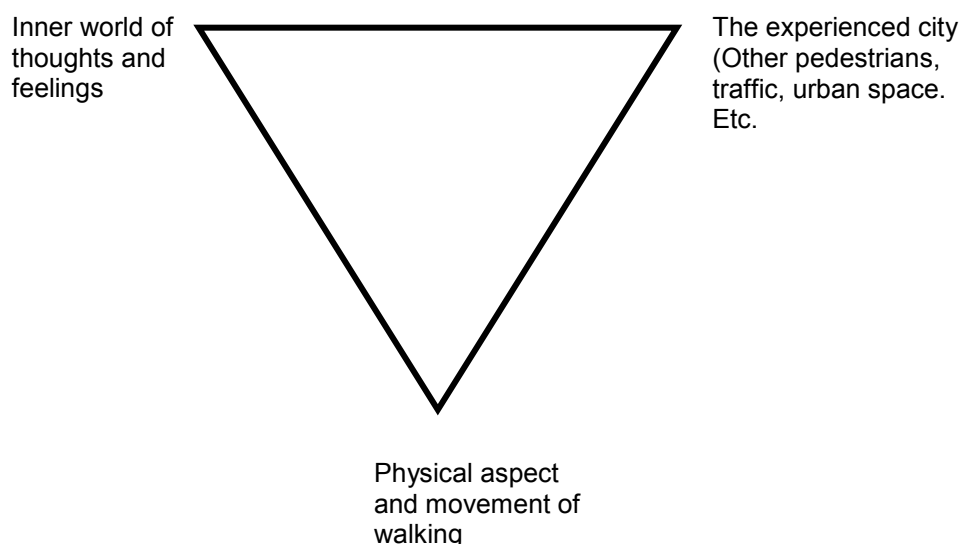
The research involved interviews with 31 participants (18 female, 13 male) from in and around Bristol, UK. The adult participants varied in age from under 20 years old to over 70 and were recruited from a range of places including choirs, a soup kitchen, a church, a civic society and organisations working with the elderly. Participants varied by occupation, walking behaviour and car ownership. The interviews were in two phases (different participants used in each phase). The first phase looked specifically at the pedestrian experience of motor traffic, using 'walkalong' interviews in the city centre of Bristol. The second phase examined the urban walking experience more generally. It consisted of room interviews where walking experience was explored in recollection.

Both phases of interviews were structured in ways that prompted rich conversation about what can be taken for granted daily experience. The walkalongs provided the prompts of the sights and sounds surrounding us as we walked. The room interviews began looking at descriptions of walks that the participants had written. In this way the interviews were able to begin with tangible detailed exploration of the walking experience and progressively moved onto discussing the essence of the experience. Participants were given a good degree of freedom to talk about whatever was important to them, within the topic area. Most of the evidence presented in this paper is taken from the second phase of interviews.

### Findings and discussion: The triangle of relationships

The main concept to be developed from the data is that the urban pedestrian experience can in part be understood in terms of relationships between the physical movement of walking, the inner life of the pedestrian and the outer experienced city (as shown in figure 1 below). The two themes of walking being unobtrusive and thinking time are discussed in relation to this triangle of relationships.

**Figure 1: Concept of what constitutes the experience of an urban walk**



The 'inner world' relates to everything that is 'inside' the pedestrian as they walk: Their thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination for instance. The experienced city relates to everything in their urban environment as they walk. The physical aspect is the actual

movement and physical exertion of the walking body. The study from which this paper is drawn examined a number of aspects of the relationships between these three aspects, but the focus of this paper is on the unobtrusive quality of the physical aspect of walking and the different ways in which the inner world and the experienced city can be related in the pedestrian's thought life.

### **Physical act of walking may be unobtrusive**

Analysis of the interviews in this research suggested that the physical movement of walking in itself is often unobtrusive and is rarely considered by the urban walker. Participants talked far less about it than about the other two points on the triangle. Drawing out the unobtrusiveness of the physical aspect, and other aspects of urban walking is a theoretical development provided by the research that can inform future approaches to understanding what is important in urban walking experience.

Enjoying the physical act of walking was raised by Ben, whose use of 'stomp' suggests an expressive and perhaps relished physicality in his urban walking.

*'I will just go for a walk, I just go and stomp somewhere'*

However Ben was the exception. There was little evidence of any positive, enjoyable attention to the body while urban walking. In fact explicit comments were made indicating that the participants didn't notice the physical aspect of their urban walking. For instance Zoe commented:

Zoe *'...Yeah and physical movement again, I don't ever really think, 'Right oh I'm using my legs or body, to walk, it's just er....'*

Tom (interviewer and author) *'..You don't pay attention to it really...'*

Zoe *'No and I guess because I do it every day, it's just a normal thing in my life. If you're a driver and you go for a walk, it's a completely different experience, but for me I it's just an everyday thing in my life, it's a natural thing'*

Similarly Rose felt she did not have to focus on the 'mechanics of walking' in the same way that she would the mechanics of driving or of cycling, suggesting that as a process of moving, walking takes less attention.

Because for many people the mechanics of walking doesn't need attention, walking can be a time for other interests. In fact the repetitive rhythmic nature of the physical act may actually increase the ability to concentrate on other interests. James talked of the rhythm of walking and Derek talked of enjoying a steady pace. In both cases the effect of the rhythm was not to focus an increased attention on the body or physical movement, but to enable the mind to engage more vividly with creative thoughts. So the physical movement of walking was sometimes seen to play an important role in the walking experience, but not through focusing attention on itself.

Earlier it was raised that if pedestrians do not pay attention to their physical movement they may not regard walking as worthwhile exercise which has implications for encouraging more active lifestyles. Darker et al.'s (2007) concept that walking could be surreptitious as exercise also emerged through the interviews. Rose for instance talked about walking being 'the sort of exercise you take without knowing it. The surreptitiousness of walking was not limited to conceptions of exercise: Rose suggested that walking had an unobtrusive healing effect on her knee and broadened out this idea to suggest that walking can unobtrusively make people feel better 'in all sorts of ways':

*'I had recurrent knee problems, and that I used to have to do specific exercise for that was a drag, so as soon as my knees stopped hurting I gave it up but (it) just sort of disappears when you're, when you're walking so I think it's quite magic actually. I think, I think it's a way of making you feel better in all sorts of ways, without actually noticing that that's what you're doing, it's an incidental, I don't go because it's going to make me feel better, I go because I want to do it and I really, really enjoy it and it makes me feel better...mm...'*

Rose describes walking as 'magic.' Magic often relies on things being unseen. This suggests that in some ways the act of walking is a shadowy and subtle process that, as Rose

indicates, is hard to notice. Ben echoed this idea of the surreptitious healing effect of walking, but in relation to his emotional state. He commented that while walking did 'wonders' for him in this respect, he couldn't explain why.

Melanie suggested that for her walking often goes unnoticed. This is not because it is a distant or tenuous experience but because it is so primary, so near to her, an idea that she illustrated with the metaphor of breathing:

Melanie *'Well it's secondary....either it's unobtrusive and secondary or it's so primary if you like, that it doesn't occur, just in the way that you don't think of breathing I suppose.....where it's such a fact of what's happening, of the situation.....yeah, which is funny I suppose....because I would never think of it that way, and I would never think of walking....as..an experience in its own right.'*

Melanie connects the idea of walking being so primary to her that she does not notice it, to claiming that she never thinks about walking as an experience in its own right. This may be relevant more widely to many urban walkers. In the same way that few people will attend to their own breathing (unless they have motivations of meditation or mindfulness), many able bodied pedestrians may ignore the movement of the body when taking a daily walking trip.

The evidence from the interviews suggests that the physical aspect of moving the body often goes unnoticed and that walking may often go unnoticed as it comes so naturally to many people. With these facets of the unobtrusiveness of walking in mind, a useful metaphor can be formed, based on observations by Melanie and other participants. This is that walking in itself i.e. the physical act and accomplishment of the body which takes the person from place to place, is like a fluent and self-effacing party host, who introduces us to other experiences, such as the sights and sounds of the city, or trains of thought on other matters, and who then discreetly disappears from our consciousness. In support of this idea, the weight of the data strongly suggested that when the participants thought about their walking, the majority thought more about things they might see on the way, their surroundings, people they meet, various travel time use and other trains of thought rather than the fact and experience of physical walking itself.

In comparison to the physical act of walking, participants talked a lot about experiential elements of walking (that fall on the top side of the triangle): the inner world and the experienced city, and the interactions between these two areas. One aspect of these interactions, the thought life of the pedestrian, will now be discussed

### Thoughts independent of experienced city

Some types of thought can serve to take a pedestrian towards their inner world (the top left corner of the triangle) and absent them from their surroundings. The data highlighted three particular types of thinking that can do this. These are problem solving, personal reflection and daydreaming.

A number of participants alluded to using walking time as a time for thinking about problems. Ben's contemplations of problems led him so deeply into his inner world (or onto 'another planet') that often a near collision with an obstacle would shock him back into awareness of his surroundings:

*'....especially if I've got a lot going through my head, right I've got a lot of emotional stuff going on, or I've got a load of problems that I'm trying to deal with or just generally life, right I do....find myself wondering in my head when I'm walking, and it's like I bump into something and it's like 'Whooah' (Tom laughs) 'let's get back to the moment shall we?' It's like being on another planet basically. Right but....that's how I get my problems sorted. That's how I process what I need to process.'*

Addressing problems whilst walking was important to some participants to the degree that they sometimes walked primarily in order to solve a problem rather than reach a destination.

In addition to problem solving a number of participants commented that their urban walks can in fact be a good time for reflection. Jane for instance commented that on her walk home she gets the chance to reflect 'a little bit' on her day. Participants reported reflecting on their day at work when walking home through the city. Echoes of the day spent at work can

persist through the journey home, and processing these seemed to serve a purpose for the participants. Reflection was mainly talked about in the context of solitary urban walking and alongside the working day another reported topic for reflection was self. Lee for instance commented:

*'..Dominant factors' (in the walking experience) 'are probably...so recognising what's going on around me. But I think more so, personal reflection I think, I'm thinking more about myself than I am what's going on around me.'*

Personal reflection is a form of thinking which can be quite separate from interaction with surroundings as it will often take the form of ruminating steadily, often in memory, on one subject: the day at work, or self, for instance. In fact Lee contrasted the process of reflection against paying attention to surroundings, suggesting the two processes are not highly interactive:

*'Yeah...yeah...definitely and more, I think, If I was to look at all the times I've walked in my life there's probably more time I spend thinking about my own life and what's involved in my own life than I do thinking about the physical environment around me.....'*

Amongst participants the process of reflection seemed to be valued as useful: Maisie talked about it being 'really important' to have alone time for reflecting on her day on her walk home while Lucy considered herself wasteful for not reflecting enough while walking.

The unforced nature of walking time as a time to think was highlighted in the interviews. Unforced, unpressurised thinking can be useful for problem solving, perhaps gaining insight into a work problem for instance and useful self-reflection. However it can also be a lighter recreation. Lucy and Rose both talked about enjoying daydreaming whilst walking. Lucy mentioned it often during our interview:

*'....just walking, doesn't seem to be, by myself, doesn't seem to be that...much...of an interesting thing, though at the same time I quite enjoy listening to music or....you know, daydreaming about things, even if I have someone with me, I sometimes wish 'Oh I wish I was by myself' so I could be doing my usual, sort of....in my own little world rath', so....yeah....But I do I do sometimes though, the downside of that is I sometimes think, 'Oh actually should I really be paying more attention to the world around me and more appreciating where I am.'*

Lucy contrasts daydreaming to paying attention to her surroundings. Again then, in terms of the triangle, daydreaming for Lucy is a type of thinking which carries her into her 'own little world', in the top left of the triangle and away from the experienced city around her.

### **Inner world of thought threatened by the experienced city**

Some common types of thinking whilst walking have been seen to require the thinker to be able to inhabit their inner world, the top left corner of the triangle. However this habitation can be jeopardised by elements within the experienced city which can intrude upon it. As examples, Rose felt less able to daydream due to having to stay on her guard in the city, in order to be aware of motor traffic:

*'....and I think cars are a big problem walking in towns, so you have to stay on your guard in towns more you can't dream as much....not quite!'*

Similarly Derek found deep contemplation being precluded by interruptions and the necessity of having to negotiate the city. For him one of the conditions necessary for such contemplation is non-intrusive surroundings:

*'...it is feeling relaxed in yourself and I think the more we settle and feel comfortable with our environment: they're not intruding on us or making us you know frightened or staying aware, you find a deeper peace in your mind,....'*

Derek stipulates that conditions for a deepening peace while walking are that his surroundings be non-intrusive. If they are intrusive they make him stay 'aware' of his surroundings. Clearly many factors within the busy city environment can be intrusive, and thus Derek showed some preference for walking in rural settings as they would allow him to

settle into his mind. One of the main intrusions in the city, alluded to by Rose, Derek and others, is the presence of motor traffic and the necessity of negotiating it. So there are elements in the experienced city that can threaten the thinking of the pedestrian. However interactions between the inner world and experienced city can be more positive than this.

### The experienced city triggers thoughts

The city can inspire thinking and emotion in the pedestrian. Examples included small features of the environment triggering thought and participants analysing their surroundings and thinking about them in order to pass time. Rose, for instance, talked about how one element of her walking environment could set off a train of thought:

*'...you know sometimes I think about something that's happening during the day and then something you see when you're walking will trigger thoughts.'*

So the experienced city itself can present materials that may inspire or interact with a person's train of thought. In this respect it can offer an ever changing variety of triggers to contemplation. This idea is reminiscent of Robinson (1989, cited by Edensor, 2000, p.86) who says 'as one enters the variety and movement of the outside world, the space for interior wandering also grows.'

The experienced city may offer different inspiration for thought than those offered by rural walking. Rose talked of more 'human dramas' happening upon urban rather than rural walks. She also talked about seeing people at different stages of life and how this led her to musing on her own life. Some examples of how Rose's urban surroundings inspired her thought processes were positive, while some were negative. For instance she talked of how some unsightly steps put in her park cause her to have negative chains of thought:

*'They've put some incredibly ugly steps in our local park, well the steps are alright it's the railings that are really awful, the steps in themselves would be inoffensive. And for, for sev', well probably a few weeks I found it really quite upsetting to go in because I'd be jarred and you know, your thought process can go down', into a negative spiral can't it, you know: 'Oh look they've made this ugly. Oh, you know, isn't that typical, things get spoilt. Oh this council is rubbish.' Or whatever your thought process is.'*

Interestingly Rose's thoughts go from the specifics of the steps to other more general ideas: 'things get spoiled.' Thus the quote shows one small example of ways in which a specific feature of the walked surroundings can lead to other topics of thought. Rose reported that her cognitions, triggered by her surroundings could often lead to an ongoing change of mood: positive or negative.

Lee's interview also gave insight into how inner thoughts and the walked environment can interact. At one point he commented on ways in which thinking about his walked surroundings and other trains of thought can either inspire or obscure each other:

*'Yeah it can work in a way where I'm thinking about the day ahead, and then I'll see something and suddenly I'll...start thinking about that instead, and then, after I've thought about that for a while, I'll try to go back to what I was thinking about beforehand (Tom laughs) and I, sometimes I can't remember what it was. Or it could be the other way round, it could be I'll be looking at something and then I'll think 'Oh shit I forgot something', or ....you know, it's weird, but it's almost like it's, they overlap each other'*

Here Lee has thoughts about his surroundings and thoughts about other matters such as his coming day at work. These two topics of thought can interrupt or overlap each other. Lee indicates that sometimes paying attention to surroundings can interrupt his train of thought and thought processes and paying attention to surroundings may be in opposition.

It has been suggested then that in some cases, such as in the case of pedestrian thinking, the inner world point of the triangle and the experienced city point can mutually enhance each other, while in others they can compete against each other for the pedestrian's attention. Perhaps a deeper understanding of the walking experience is gained through considering more widely that at some times the points on the triangle may enhance each other, i.e. to pay attention to one point may inspire the paying of increased attention to the

others, whereas at other times they may vie against each other for the attention of the walker.

## **Conclusions**

It has been suggested that the essence of urban pedestrian experience, can be usefully understood by detailed analysis of the relationships between the inner world of the pedestrian, the city they experience and the physical movement of walking. Some Implications and areas for further research drawn from the triangle concept and specifically from the two themes presented in this paper, will now be briefly indicated.

The argued unobtrusiveness of the physical act of urban walking has implications for academic study. It suggests that in everyday life many people do not overly think about the fact that they are walking. Of course in order to write academically about walking, the academic does have to think about it. This suggests the possibility that there may be a tendency to focus on the physical movement of walking when writing about it that may give a distorted image of the urban walking experience.

The unobtrusive party host concept also suggests the possibility that there are experiences related to walking, which may be as or more important than walking itself. These may provide different angles for conceptualising what constitutes an urban walk. The urban walker may be more concerned with experiencing the city, having a time for personal contemplation while on the move or enjoying the interplay between inner and outer worlds that is facilitated by a naturally human speed of movement, rather than consciously enjoying walking itself. So it is suggested that walks should not always be conceptualised from the point of view of walking, but rather as a group of different possible experiences, internal and external, in which walking is a common thread.

Two implications from the second theme discussed in this paper, the thought life of the pedestrian, can be suggested here. One is that there is potential to inspire the thought life of the pedestrian, the other is that there is also a need to protect it. Understanding that the walked environment can influence the pedestrian experience and pedestrian behaviour is intuitive and is not new (Sinnett et al., 2011, DfT, 2007). However previous studies have usually focused on the aesthetics of the walking environment, whether it looks attractive, and also the practicalities, whether the walking route is easy to physically negotiate and navigate.

The data of the present study suggests that in addition to the concerns of aesthetics and the practical ease of progress, the ways in which the walked surroundings stimulate the thoughts, emotions and imagination of the walker are also important. Of these the thought life of the pedestrian has been particularly highlighted in this paper. There are some hints of the importance of walking environments inspiring the interest of the pedestrian in previous studies and policy. But these are hints only and may in some cases be referring to interesting the pedestrian visually rather than cognitively.

The present research has detailed some of the ways in which the imaginative and cognitive elements of walks take place and are important. It has thus added understanding to Living Streets<sup>1</sup> reports that participants tended to walk more after walks aimed at stimulating the walker's imagination and thought. Further research could investigate ways in which walks and walking environments could be made emotionally, cognitively and imaginatively stimulating in a positive sense.

While elements of the experienced city might inspire the pedestrian's inner world of thought, other elements may threaten and disrupt it. As discussed, some of the types of thinking valued when walking, such as problem solving, personal reflection and daydreaming, necessitate being able to 'lose yourself' in the inner world. Such types of thinking require the pedestrian to be able to exist in the top left corner of the triangle without being interrupted or

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<sup>1</sup> A charity set up to champion the cause of pedestrians

disrupted by elements in the city such as motor traffic, cyclists, crowding and poor walking conditions.

So if the inner life and thought life of the pedestrian is to be enjoyed, it needs to be protected as far as possible from disrupting elements in the city environment that might require the pedestrian's attention. Cognitive tasks that require the pedestrian's attention, in a negative sense, as they navigate the city should be minimised. Disruption to the pedestrian's thought life may have negative significance for their well-being. It may also impact business and the economy in areas of cities where a large numbers of commuters are part of the knowledge economy, and need to think for a living, even outside of their workplace.

The aim of making the pedestrian's progress as easy as possible is not new - it has been championed by previous policy and reports (DfT, 2007). However, the contribution of the present study is to understand that not only are routes that facilitate ease of movement attractive and fast for the pedestrian to use, they may also help the pedestrian to enjoy deeper and more involved trains of thought while they walk. Further research could seek to achieve better understanding of the detailed ways in which the city environment can help or hinder the thought life of the pedestrian.

This paper has presented the triangle concept for analysing the urban pedestrian experience. Two specific aspects of such analysis have been discussed. More are covered in the thesis itself and will be highlighted in subsequent journal papers.

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