# Footwork: moving and knowing in local space(s)

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*Qualitative Research* 2009 9: 571
DOI: 10.1177/1468794109343626

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*Qualitative Research*

vol. 9(5) 571–585

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ABSTRACT This article is concerned with movement and terrain and with the ways in which qualitative inquiry might engage with and combine these in local studies of people and places. Movement is at a premium today – no shortage of social and cultural commentators insist on it – and bids fair to provide the social sciences with a new conceptual paradigm. Mobile actors abound and what were once spaces of place are now reckoned spaces of flows; space itself, emancipated from territory, becomes mobile and is deployed as a capacity. Qualitative research, having always allowed its actors to deploy a richer and more fluid world, is well placed to respond – but for one significant snag. The article sets the question: What happens to the qualitative commitment to the local, to grounded research and fieldwork, now that processes of mobility are said to transcend setting and location? Rather than look to ways in which to extend the reach of the qualitative researcher – across space, between places – the article considers how qualitative research, while remaining local, might nonetheless be brought together with movement. Two first-hand empirical examples of local qualitative inquiries directed to movement (as object and method) are used to develop this line of argument. A focus on *pedestrian* movement in particular aligns the article with widening inter-disciplinary and methodological interest in walking practices.

KEYWORDS: *mobility*, *place*, *patrol*, *walking*, *youth*

## *Introduction*

In this article I am concerned with terrain and movement, and with the ways in which qualitative inquiry can engage with and combine these in local studies of people and places. That qualitative inquiry might find focus in a given locale and territory is nothing new; if anything, local qualitative inquires today must find ways in which to demonstrate an investigative 'reach' extending beyond any simple – and simplistic – notion of a bounded ethnographic field. Rethinking the 'field' has become a significant, and productive, challenge for qualitative researchers (see, for example, Amit, 2000). This questioning of

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place and territory as settings for qualitative inquiry proceeds from a widening recognition of fluidity and movement, of a mobile world in which people and things, influences and effects, work across space and at a distance, breaching the boundaries of location. This is the 'new mobilities' paradigm as identified by Sheller and Urry (2006); it can be located within, or at a leading edge of the wider 'spatial turn' in the social sciences and humanities (see Thrift, 2006). Thus, if the qualitative researcher must go 'where the action is', as Goffman has it (1969), then it seems, increasingly, that the action is dispersed, no longer contained in any single setting or location. Qualitative research can respond to this challenge in a number of ways. But my present purpose in this article is not to extend the reach of the qualitative researcher, at least not in space – that is, not across distance. I am concerned instead with location and territory, with continuing, local, qualitative inquiries. Even so, I want to consider the ways in which such inquires, while remaining local, might nonetheless be brought together with movement. I also want to expand on the idea of the local field of inquiry, not by looking beyond it, but by calling into question the figuring of field – location, territory – as a *setting* for investigation: no more than *where* the action is. I do this by way of illustration, providing two case-study examples of local qualitative/ethnographic enquiries directed to places, people and local mobilities. A focus on *pedestrian* movement links the two examples, and I will have more to say about footwork in due course.

The article, then, is divided into three principal sections. Following these introductory remarks, I consider the new mobilities paradigm alongside the continuing significance of place; this section is contextual, providing some points of theoretical and conceptual orientation. Following which, I turn to the first of my case-study examples: urban ethnographic research with street-carers and outreach teams working with the city-centre homeless in Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. My second example of local qualitative inquiry reports on a series of mobile interviews conducted with young people coming of age in a town undergoing dramatic economic, social and physical transformation – changing lives in a changing (local) place. The article's main argument is contained in these three principal sections, but is reprised and summarized in a concluding section in which I make a claim for the particular value of pedestrian inquiries for qualitative research.

## *Movement, space and setting*

Identifying the formation of a new paradigm within the social sciences, the 'new mobilities' paradigm, Sheller and Urry write:

> All the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces – these and many others fill the world's airports, buses, ships, and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense. Internationally there are

> over 700 million legal passenger arrivals each year (compared with 25 million in 1950) with a predicted 1 billion by 2010; there are 4 million air passengers each day; 31 million refugees are displaced from their homes; and there is one car for every 8.6 people ... Many different bodies are on the move ... and this movement shows relatively little sign of *substantially* abating in the longer term. This is so even after September 11, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), multiple suicide bombings of transport networks, and other global catastrophes, and that fact that many grand projects in transport do not at first generate the scale of anticipated traffic. (2006: 207; italics in original)

Added to this are '[n]ew forms of "virtual" and "imaginative" travel', as well as myriad commodities and components variously freighted, carried, smuggled, transported and traded around the world (2006: 207–8). All of which movement is making for a new paradigm or 'mobility turn', identifiable across a number of disciplines and study areas including anthropology, sociology, geography, cultural studies, science and technology studies, tourism and transport studies. Sheller and Urry develop this fusillade of evidence and assertion as something more than a descriptive account of a world gone mobile; the mobility turn is also a part of a broader theoretical project aimed at undermining an established and sedentary social science that 'treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness' (2006: 208).[1] Among a number of theoretical antecedents and influences, the authors identify the spatial turn as a contributor to the 'new mobilities' paradigm.

Needless to say, place and location do not do so very well out of all this. Mobility is 'always located and materialised' in particular places (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 210), and continues to be so; but place as a primary container for social life and a basic unit of social research and analysis, what Augé (1995) calls 'anthropological place', is the domain and object of a sedentary social science. Space and motion are where the action is now – and this is space as plural, porous and co-constituted together with motion; space as 'open and dynamic' (Massey, 1999: 264) and unfolding through time. To take just one example, germane to the first of the two case-studies presented below, such reconfigurations of space and theory afford a new perspective on the place of the city. No longer a spatial clot – of place, power, people, dwelling and situated economy – the city is opened up to fluidity and transitivity; thus cities may be reconsidered 'as much spaces of flows as they are spaces of place' (Yeoh, 2006: 150), and as spaces in which space itself is to be deployed, as a capacity (Corsin Jiménez, 2003). This is a new urbanism chary of the city itself, as bounded territory. Translocal process is important here, and fast becoming a commonplace of urban commentary: global flows – of people, goods and signs – subvert the city as bounded site (see Hannerz, 1996).

Sheller and Urry's opening account of a world on the move is confident and broad-brush.[2] Against which wide-ranging description, and in the face of what is a sometimes rather abstract theorizing of space and flows, it is possible

to offer an insistence on the continuing significance of place. The case for emplacement in sociological research and analysis is well made by Gieryn (2000), and repeatedly borne out by the best empirical work in qualitative sociology in particular (see Zussman, 2004). Perhaps anthropology (my own discipline), with its once-constitutive methodological commitment to emplacement – field, site, locality – has provided the most developed consideration of the continuing significance of place amidst the complexity of global mobility and proliferating space. The struggle to reconcile ethnographic practice, local knowledge and a runaway, mobile world has been a productive anthropological concern for decades (see Leach, 1968; Marcus, 1995; Strathern, 1987; also Burawoy et al., 2000) and has involved a careful and reflexive examination of place and the idea of the 'field' in a trans-local space of flows. A developed appreciation of global process, held in tension with a disciplinary reluctance to move too far or fast from grounded experience, gives contemporary anthropology a sophisticated commitment to understanding *through* the local and particular. Here the very arbitrariness of place, its particularity, is what matters: an explicitly partial window on totalizing description which tests and challenges the coherence of models (Candea, 2007). Such emplacement serves as a useful counterweight to the theorization of location as transcended. Thus cities, to return to my previous example, might remain places; diasporic and global mobility need not dissolve them altogether, invalidating sited inquiry. For the urban ethnographer, in place in the city, interest might lie in the interplay between the city as place and the assorted mobilities (and imaginaries) it fosters (see, for example, Reed's [2002] engaging and emplaced urban anthropological response to the generalized concept of 'global cities').

## EVERYDAY URBANISM, LOCAL MOTION AND LANDSCAPE

Having twice taken the city as a case in point, I want to comment further on developments in the new trans- and post-disciplinary urbanism, which, while clearly aligned with the spatial and mobilities turns, also make space for a continuing – intensified and re-energized – appreciation of place. This is not to insist on or establish a binary opposition – fixity and location as against space and motion. Instead, what is of interest about the new urbanism (see Amin, 2007; Amin and Thrift, 2002) is its concern with another order of fluidity, decidedly local: the small and (seemingly) trivial practices and movements that constitute the urban everyday. Routine urban undulations – mundane recurrences, people and objects making the rounds and doing the usual, practices started over and over again – are as much a part of the flow of the city as are translocal circuits of movement, and, as such, equally disruptive of a sedentarist social science. This appreciation of movement and the city crosses tracks, then, with a contemporary interest in the everyday and banal (see Augé, 1995; Highmore, 2002; Seigworth, 2000), attending to quotidian urban spaces, movements and time-signatures (Thrift, 2005: 134). We can note here a particular order of mobility, hardly new: walking. Various forms and technologies

of transportation are implied and even privileged in accounts of a mobile world, but it remains the case that walking – so very ordinary and antique – continues to constitute a massive proportion of most people's day-to-day mobility. And most of this everyday walking is local, threaded through local place (for all that it also underpins many other enhanced and trans-local mobilities [Urry, 2007: 63]). The essential point is a simple but significant one: mobility need not exceed and escape place; there is no need to position the two terms as a zero sum game in which the more we have of one the less we must have of the other. Locals move as much as they ever did; staying put, as any fieldworker can tell you, involves moving around. Here then, as signalled in my introduction, is a way in which qualitative inquiries, while remaining local and site-specific, might nonetheless be brought together with movement.

Before turning to my two case-study examples of qualitative research in and through local motion, there is a further and important argument to be had about the relationship between (local) movement and place. Here it pays to attend to vocabulary. Speaking up for 'place', as the site of lived experience of location, geographer Tim Cresswell contrasts place with 'space', which he describes as 'a more abstract concept … [which] has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning' (2004: 8–10). Here place is defined as what happens when humans occupy and apply meaning to space. This simple contrast (not one that Cresswell holds to) is in keeping with a sedentarist social science concerned with place as the site and horizon of human life, admitting movement only as a neutral process of transport – from one place to another, from here to there, across space. This is the space of the map, as an abstract horizontal dimension of transport, space as stilled distance, not space as 'the sphere of a dynamic simultaneity' (see Massey, 2005: 107). This latter definition admits a full-blown appreciation of mobility, one in which it is not enough to say only that things and people move – more and more of them, quicker and further – but in which space itself moves too, is implicated as something other, and more, than an abstract medium for action. What then is the local space that one moves across, without 'leaving', when one moves in place; and how might that local space be more than a backdrop to events? Local space – the space of place – is 'terrain', possibly 'landscape'; but there are difficulties here similar to those just encountered. Do those moving around in place do so only 'across' a local terrain? Consider the urban terrain: the city might very well seem, at a glance, to confront us as a fixed assembly, an extensive site of frozen labour (Goodman and Goodman, 1960: 3) – just so massively *there*; but it would be a limited appreciation of everyday urban mobility that assumed a life lived in such a place involved no more than movement amidst a terrain – structures, gradients and surfaces – given once and for all and now a stage-set; a fixed configuration of structures, obstacles and avenues. No one living in a city today can imagine the place – the terrain – is not continually shifting. Nor is this a process only 'taking place' on a grand scale and removed from the life of the streets – behind safety barriers, as buildings go up and down amidst swinging cranes. The terrain is

shaped by every scuff and rub arising from flows of local motion: every cracked paving stone and trodden verge is a record of passage which implicates the terrain in the movement 'across' it. Landscape is an especially interesting term in this context. Referring back to the particular history of landscape painting and the science of optics Cresswell ties a definition of landscape to the now conventional idea of vista – landscape as scenery, something we look at rather than live in – again, a backcloth to practice (2004: 10–11). Landscape, thus defined, is to place something akin to what the map is to space: the fixed look of the thing from afar/above. Yet the concept of landscape can be understood very differently. Consider Ingold's definition of place and landscape as a *lived* and *material* terrain owing its character to the experiences it affords those spending time there, and shaped, in turn, by the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage (2000: 192). Landscape here is a form arising from reciprocal engagement – not a setting prepared in advance for occupation, but arising from the interplay of figure(s) and ground; landscape as the embodiment of cycles of movement (Ingold, 2000: 193). To move through place – as landscape – is to move with it, not simply because it is moving too, though it may be (independently of the movements it hosts, see Massey, 2005: 131–7), but because to move is to make and shape, and be made and shaped in return. Finally here, we can note that these (re)definitions of space, place and landscape as something to move with rather than be moved across carry implications for what it is to know a place. To know a place only as a specified location, the setting for events, to know space as uniformly calibrated distance, is to know from the outside – to survey. To know place as landscape is to move through and with it in such a way that knowledge is built up along lines of movement, and walking becomes 'itself a form of circumambulatory knowing' (Ingold, 2004: 331).

## *Case-study: urban patrol*

My first case-study example takes the centre of the city as a space of operations. The particular city I have in mind is Cardiff, the capital city of Wales; and the operations I have in mind are those of a team of professional outreach workers employed by Cardiff County Council to deliver a social service to the homeless on the city-centre streets. I use this case-study to illustrate, empirically, some of the arguments I have worked through in the previous section, specifically the imbrication of knowledge, movement and landscape.

Situated in South Wales alongside the Severn estuary, Cardiff was one of the great maritime ports of Victorian Britain, although never a major industrial conurbation; today it serves as an area hub for public and service sector employment in particular, an 'enclave of relative prosperity in one of the poorest regions of the UK' (Thomas, 2003: 12). In 2005 Cardiff celebrated its 50th anniversary as the capital city of Wales. Cardiff's commercial, civic and administrative core occupies not much more than a square mile of territory in the heart of the city, one small patch of which, two floors up from the street, is

occupied by the offices of the Cardiff County Council City Centre Team (CCT). The CCT is an interesting set-up: a multi-disciplinary team (bringing together social work staff of varying seniority and expertise, an NHS funded nurse, an assortment of project workers and advisory staff, and three outreach workers) with a remit that is both spatial and social. The CCT works with and supports vulnerable adults of almost any description, presenting almost any particular need or difficulty, who present those needs and difficulties in public space in the centre of the city. Potential clients then are those whose behaviour, addictions, health and housing needs, financial, family and other circumstances or problems have brought them into some sort of a relationship with the centre of the city: people who have come unstuck in the middle of things. This includes, for example, street drinkers, beggars, prostitutes, and also the rough-sleeping homeless.

A good share of the working practice of the CCT involves the familiar and mainstream business of public sector welfare provision – calls, case-notes, needs assessment, computer entry, referrals, team meetings. Even so, prior to and sustaining all this, and crucially for the CCT, there is the work of outreach: making enquiries and introductions, establishing trust, assessing need and providing basic services (hot food, first aid, condoms, advice and information, a helping hand) out-of-doors and on the streets. It is through the work of outreach that the team makes and maintains contact with a core client group who would otherwise, some of them, struggle to access mainstream social and health services. Thus, when interested parties – journalists, social work students, visiting practitioners, even the occasional ethnographer – approach the CCT to learn more about the work that they do, the first thing that usually happens is that they are invited to join the outreach workers on duty. Not because that is all there is to the CCT, but because that is where the work begins – out of doors and on foot.

## FIGURATIVE AND MATERIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF OUTREACH

Where does this work of outreach take place? In the city centre, obviously, and on the streets as I have already indicated. Yet, and for all that this is work in the centre – in the middle of a place – it also operates at and along a margin, and crosses a border. Outreach workers are tasked to reach out – to those whose lives and lived circumstances may test the limits of public consideration and understanding; they patrol a 'boundary of inequality', as Sennett (2004: 20) has it, writing of social work more generally; the work is something others might recoil from, as a physically and morally unsettling, sometimes dangerous, undertaking (see Rowe, 1999). This is the figurative geography of outreach; a socio-moral perimeter that runs, contrarily, through the middle of the *physical* city. Add to this that Cardiff also has material margins running through its middle, though these are shrinking fast: remaindered and overlooked corners and spaces in and around the city centre, the concrete purlieus of urban architecture – fire exit stairwell, railway sidings, derelict ground. To spend any time

with the CCT outreach workers is to get to know these spaces and settings only too well, as sites where (potential) clients of the team cluster and can be found – drinking cider, sleeping out, sniffing glue or whatever else. Which is to say that outreach workers know the city centre in a particular way, spending time in particular places (many of these 'out of the way' for all that this is the city centre), aligning their presence in local space to the patterned occupancy of those they are tasked to assist. CCT outreach workers knowledge of need and vulnerability in the middle of the city is thus emplaced, tied to a knowledge of place(s). Yet this emplaced knowledge needs to be understood as consisting of something other than knowledge of a set of separate locations in which the work of outreach gets done. This would be to relegate the actual footwork of outreach to a necessary but neutral process of transportation, getting from A to B to C; outreach staff working then walking then working again. No landscape here, just a spatially distributed series of locations to be moved between in sequence in the course of an outreach patrol. To construe outreach work in this way, as a sequence of 'stops' strung together by motion, is to miss its essence as a mobile practice, a roving administration. There are of course occasions when outreach workers do head off from the CCT offices on their way to specified locations, intent on arrival and hurrying along to get there quick, wherever 'there' may be – perhaps the bus station toilets where, according to a call just received, a client has collapsed. But the daily work of outreach is seldom so purposive; it is much more exploratory than responsive. To go out 'on outreach' for a couple of hours is to move – to drift, even – through the city, in a meandering but at the same time alert and receptive mode. Walking pace suits such open inquiries very well. Outreach, then, is walking as a discursive rather than a purposive practice (see Wunderlich, 2008). And although these sweeps of the city do generally take in just those particular locations that the outreach workers know only too well, the entire walk is in fact given over to gleaning further knowledge of a known but shifting *landscape*.

## MOVEMENT WITH(IN) A LANDSCAPE

In returning to the word landscape I want to signal here some of the ways in which the work of outreach takes place with, and not simply across, Cardiff's city centre. The first of these has to do with the simple physicality of the work. Outreach is out-of-doors, all-weather work in an environment which takes its toll on those who move around it, especially those whose movements are inquisitive. Outreach workers not only cover a lot of ground but are forever clambering over walls, stooping under netting, pushing through urban planting, squeezing through gaps; all of which can make itself felt – boots scuffed, knuckles scraped, coats stained, wet, worn and torn. And as they make their rounds outreach workers leave their own small marks of passage too. Moreover, the movements they make are likely to be in pursuit of traces already made and now confirmed as outreach workers track and follow potential clients. A sheet of plywood hoarding hanging loose from a perimeter fence

will always catch an outreach worker's eye, as a sign to be followed up on: Who's done that? Why? Is someone dossing down in the vacant office building beyond? Pulling back the sheet to 'take a little look and see', outreach workers pursue and corroborate a trace in place (see Anderson and Moles, 2008). The fabric of the city has been shaped – that sheet now hanging that little bit looser – by the movements within it. Add to this the ongoing work of urban regeneration that has seen the look and shape of central Cardiff quite dramatically altered over the last 10 years and which has significantly impacted on the work of the CCT, which has had to adjust its practice to meet new configurations of space and layout, new prohibitions and affordances. And then, finally here, there is the gleaning of knowledge. Walking daily through a changing cityscape, on the look out for needy people and/or traces – clues – of their presence, outreach workers are not best described as finding out about the city but with and through it. They glean knowledge not of but from a landscape, which the experienced eye can make tell (see Ingold, 2000: 190). To spend time with outreach workers on patrol in the city centre, on the look-out for need and vulnerability, is to see the city animated by a roving attention: silver foil in the car park stairwell – drug use (check the upper storeys); sheets of cardboard stashed by the law courts – someone's new home perhaps (come back tonight to find out who); public benches removed from the bus station – the day-time drinkers will migrate (ask around to find out where); a familiar doorway now swept clean and disinfected (what has happened to the long-established occupant?). For these contemporary practitioners, the city centre is not so much a catchment area as a terrain *through which* they practice, *from which* they know. Outreach is a foray of attention, and education – in a landscape.

## *Case study: youth in a changing townscape*

My second case-study example is also taken from south east Wales, about 30 miles away from the city centre of Cardiff in a town called Ebbw Vale where colleagues and I have undertaken a series of qualitative interviews with young people growing up in an area undergoing significant economic and physical transformation.[3] I use this case-study to signal the ways in which local lives and biographies take shape not only *in*, but *with* place, such that the two are run together. This is to confirm the claim I have already made: that local place is more than setting or location. Additionally here I consider the use of (pedestrian) motion as a research method in itself.

Ebbw Vale is a town in the South Wales valleys, a geographically and economically distinct region, historically associated with intensive extractive industry and manufacture; 200 years of coal mining and iron and steel production. Over recent decades, as the British economy has shifted away from a base in heavy industry, the region has borne the brunt of significant post-industrial transformation. Heavy industry is heritage in Blaenau Gwent today, if it is anything at all. Ebbw Vale, the largest of the four big centres of population in

the borough, provides a recent and particularly stark – visually stark – example. Ebbw Vale was a town organized around the production and processing of steel – economically, socially and also topographically. The Ebbw Vale steelworks once occupied a massive site on the valley floor, with housing arranged alongside and rising up above the site, making a spectacle of the town's economic base. Steel was in this way central to Ebbw Vale, right in the middle of the place and visible to all. A very few years ago, the works, run down over a decade or more, closed for good and have since been entirely demolished, leaving a levelled plateau at the centre of the town 200 acres in size; a decisive transformation of economy and place. Today Ebbw Vale is the focus of significant regeneration activity aiming at a comprehensive renewal of the economy and locality, a further significant transformation aiming to deliver a 'step change' in the fortunes of the area, to use the language of the key strategy document driving the regeneration process, the Ebbw Vale Master-Plan:

> The Masterplan will create a new community in Ebbw Vale, vibrant with heritage and new opportunities. The redevelopment will create new places for learning, working and recreation. It will link into the existing fabric of the town and make strong connections to … important local landmarks. The site is being reclaimed … [and will be] replaced with high quality development and landscape.[4]

All of which makes Ebbw Vale a particularly interesting place in which to be doing almost any sort of research, and certainly so given the arguments I have made above about place as being always that much more than a setting in which people's lives and identities might happen to be located. Ebbw Vale is changing in ways which make it only too apparent that the qualitative researcher can stay put, in place, and still engage with movement: the very place is moving on. In this context, the research we have carried out has focused particularly on young people living locally and the ways in which the changes they are experiencing in their own lives, growing up and older, into adulthood, are woven into the accelerated changes that their town is going through. The movement from youth to adulthood is conventionally positioned as, among other things, a 'difficult' and uncertain time, and there is certainly some truth in this for the young people of Ebbw Vale today. Although the local regeneration effort is underway, the more significant of the planned-for benefits are long-term and some years away still. For those coming of age in the interim, the transition to adulthood looks like being hard work.

## FIGURATIVE AND MATERIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF YOUTH

Where does this work of transition take place? Just as the work of outreach has its figurative geography, so too does the work of transition. In fact the sociological literature on youth transitions is replete with metaphors of space and movement. 'Making the move' from dependence to majority and adult roles, young people are variously described as following particular 'routes' and 'pathways'; they are on this or that 'trajectory'. Difficulties arise and young people find themselves diverted or stalled; familiar passage is obscured and

'bridges' broken; new skills of 'navigation' equip young people to cross an open field of possibility, a new 'terrain' of risk and opportunity. Shifts in preference for one or other of these terms reflect the development of theoretical perspectives on youth transitions over time (Evans and Furlong, 1997), but what remains constant is the underlying trope: the language of geographical space and journeying standing in for movements in social space. And of course, for our research respondents in Ebbw Vale, this is a figurative geography which runs through physical space and is distributed across the town: school, college, workplace, home (parental and own), youth club, sports field, pub; different sites aligned to particular component steps in the movement through youth to adult independence. Moving around between and on from one to the next of these materially constitutes the lived experience of youth and transition in place (and time). But this movement is not to be simply understood as unfolding *across* local space. Rather than presenting a distribution of given settings to then be navigated, local space is that through and with which lives take shape; the relationship between the geography of the town and the biographies of its young people is one in which elements of biography are woven together with place(s). Consider this short extract from an interview with one of our young (female) respondents:

> And um, there's a river down there that used to run through the Steelworks and then run back out, and it was about 2 or 3 years ago that I just like was crossing with my mates, and they'd sort of gone down the tunnel … so I sort of went to go after 'em, next thing I know the lot of 'em come boomin' out … and I just sort of slipped … and realised that I was in the water … and it's sort of stuck ever since. They used to do it, call me it, to annoy me at first but after a while I just sort of got used to it …

A mundane account of the acquisition of a (here unspecified) nickname, and yet also an elementary demonstration of the 'constitutive coingredience' of identity and place (Casey, 2001: 684) in which 'who' and 'where' are run together. This young woman's passing mention of the Steelworks brings me back to my earlier and essential point that it is not just lives that are moving forward in Ebbw Vale but also landscape. Young people growing up in Ebbw Vale today must make their moves (through local space and forward to adulthood) on shifting ground, amidst significant changes to their local economy and community that are also, and evidentially, material transformations: demolition, re-design, development, construction. In seeking to bring these different registers of change together as a research inquiry, my colleagues and I have gone at the question of local motion (movements of the self and transformations in landscape) through the introduction of a third movement: walking as a means to knowledge. The brief interview excerpt above is taken from a recorded conversation conducted out-of-doors and on the move, on foot, and is typical, as such, of the interviews we have undertaken in Ebbw Vale. Rather than sit down, in place (perhaps somewhere 'out of the way') to discuss the changes they are moving through, which would be to follow standard research interview practice, research respondents have been invited to take us on short

walks through local space to show us the sites, settings and changes which matter to them as having personal or community significance. Thinking back to my previous case-study example, these walks, although here a product of clear research intervention, can be considered alongside the pedestrian work of outreach: open and discursive rather than purposive patrols, generally moving between particular sites – points of established interest and significance – but given over in their entirety to gleaning further knowledge from a known but shifting landscape, which our local respondents can make tell.

## MOVEMENT WITH(IN) A LANDSCAPE

The character of inquiry we have worked for in our mobile interviews in Ebbw Vale has been ordinary and familiar. Although informed by a set of research questions relating to youth transitions and community, the interviews have been largely unstructured; and even if the walks have been at our prompting, not actually tracing a 'natural' movement in progress, we have left it to respondents to choose the routes and circuits, and more often than not they have taken the invitation as an opportunity to visit sites of personal and everyday significance. In this way the interview itineraries have tended to map closely on to respondents' routine spatial practice – walks to school, into the town centre, through local leisure settings, past the houses of friends and family and back home again. These mobile narratives have seen the past and present significance of place(s) crossing tracks with accelerated alterations to the environment in the context of community regeneration. Here is the same young woman again:

> That's my local park, or was my local park … it's changed a bit. Well they got a skate park that they put in there; they never used to have that – or the actual park itself; they used to have, like, [just] the field and two goalposts. And there used to be a block of flats up by the side, but they must have been knocked down. Um, yeah. They were all [still] up last time I came up here, which wasn't that long ago.

At their most productive we have felt these walks to be three-way conversations, with interviewee, interviewer and locality engaged in an exchange of ideas; place has been under discussion but, more than this, and crucially, underfoot and all around, and, as such, that much more of an active, present participant in the conversation, able to prompt and interject. Like urban outreach, the walks have had a seemingly sequential character, moving from one place to the next, visiting particular locations that our respondents have wanted to show us, and yet here too it has been the movement in between sites that has (sometimes) mattered just as much, providing space for 'unscripted' talk and unanticipated encounters – with (other) people and place(s) – prompting further discussion (see Hall et al., 2008), arising not from a foreseen arrival at a destination but from a landscape traversed. Moving with respondents through local space in this way has generated narratives of local life and change which are pedestrian and even rambling, which is to say lacking some of the clarity of a plotted narrative performed in sequence, but truer to life as such and perhaps an important 'workaday'

counterpoint to the (as yet unrealized) grand ambitions for 'step-change' in amidst which these young people are having to make their own way through to adult futures.

## *Conclusion*

This article has been concerned with terrain and movement, and qualitative research. Taking a lead from the 'new mobilities' paradigm, I have developed a position aligned with Sheller and Urry's critique of a sedentarist social science that figures movement and terrain as no more than a neutral process and geographical container, respectively, for social process (2006: 208–9). But beyond this I have been particularly concerned to emphasize the continuing significance of local motion, specifically walking. The two case-study examples I have provided have been qualitative studies of and through local pedestrian practice. Commenting on the mobilizing of social life today, Urry writes that 'what is crucial is that people are travelling further and faster' (2007: 4); and yet the truth in this ought not to obscure the continuing fact that most of our movements do not take us so very far or fast. To move, I have argued, is not always to move on, or away, from the place in which one already resides. Places themselves, as much as they are constituted by flows in and out, are also made up by continued traversing around. Tracking such movements – capturing them, joining them, sharing them, representing them – presents particular challenges discussed elsewhere in this journal special issue; but in directing attention to such local motion my aim here has not been to advance any specific technique as mobile method (see Ricketts Hein et al., 2008; also Jones et al., 2008), rather to suggest a more general orientation. And this is an orientation which ought really to come easy to the qualitative researcher, predisposed as he or she is, surely, to patience and consideration for the repetitive – plodding – messiness of quotidian activity. Put another way, 'itinerant ethnography', to borrow Schein's pleasing phrase, need not be 'in sprit *siteless*' (2002: 231; italics in original; quoted in Sheller and Urry, 2006: 217).

NOTES

1 This is consistent with Latour's (2005) identification of sociological understanding as static, and consequent commitment to a 'sociology of associations' in which empirical and theoretical interest must keep pace with mobile actors.
2 Later in the same article they qualify this opening fanfare: 'The new mobilities paradigm suggests a set of questions, theories and methodologies rather than a totalizing or reductive description of the contemporary world' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 210).
3 This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), award reference RES-000-23-0878; I acknowledge this support, with thanks.
4 Welsh Assembly website, URL: http://wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038231141/1675529/1675595?lang=en (consulted April 2009).

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