

Walking methods in landscape research: moving bodies, spaces of disclosure and rapport.

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Abstract

Walking methods or accompanied visits, are increasingly being used to investigate people's encounters with landscape. Walking methods are often celebrated for opening up new spaces of disclosure, building rapport and generating new knowledge of landscape. However, stating these benefits of walking as a research method has now become somewhat of a methodological orthodoxy that risks ignoring the diverse contexts and cultural circumstances within which people walk and the relational qualities of landscape. Walking methods do not simply 'uncover' people's responses to landscape, they open particular relational spaces of 'people-landscape'. Furthermore, walking does not just open up research avenues, it closes them down too. This paper explores in more depth these propositions and the complex interplay between people (as social and embodied beings), walking and landscape. The focus is on examples drawn from walks utilised as method, walks for pleasure and walks for pilgrimage, where I propose some features of the walk and the cultural context of the walker's body that should be given critical consideration when adopting a walking methodology. These include; the rhythm and style of the walk, the walk route terrain and distance and the fitness and embodied dispositions of the walker. I then question further the presumed utility of 'rapport' that leisure walks and research walks are often thought to create. In so doing this paper offers some critical insights for researchers of landscape who are considering adopting a walking methodology.

Landscape perceptions and experiences: mobile methods

"Walking whilst talking and mobile methods allow new spaces to be discovered during their practice. These new spaces are both physical ... and epistemological... Through the rhythm and practice of walking, narratives emerge that might not have been uncovered in a stationary interview....walking allows a new space of

enunciation to emerge, a new space of inquiry and discussion to be opened.” (Moles, 2008, 8)

In recent years there has been an increase in the use of mobile participatory, ethnographic and qualitative methods in landscape research. These form part of a suite of methods that are partially emergent from, what has been referred to as the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006). They also build on a history of philosophical thinking about the mobile body and its connections to landscape (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Heidegger 1971) and to non-linear, non-cartesian theories of time-space (De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre and Regulier 1999). Mobile approaches to landscape research reveal the multiple and dynamic ways in which landscapes come into being, are experienced, valued, imagined and re-assembled by different people at different times in different ways through varied habits, practices and technologies (Tolia-Kelly 2006; Eiter 2010; Ward-Thomson 2012). Mobile methods used in conjunction with video, photography and arts based forms of documentation have been shown to add texture to representations of place and landscape (O’Neill and Hubbard 2010) and aid the amplification of previously silenced voices and bodies in landscape research (Myers 2011).

However, the specific mobile practice through which landscape is encountered, the motives for that practice and the socio-political position of those on the move obviously affect how a landscape is experienced and understood. Put simply whether we are escaping conflict (Bender and Winer 2001), hiking for pleasure (Dawney 2011; Eiter 2010), herding animals (Lorimer 2006; Olwig 2008), walking to work (Middleton 2011), guiding another person (Macpherson 2009; O’Neill and Hubbard 2010) or cycling (Scott et al. 2009; Spinney 2011) has been shown to affect the ways in which landscape is encountered or assembled as physical object, as threat, as memory, scenery, or as imagined future. Perceptions of landscape also vary according to a whole array of personal and social attributes with gender, age, expertise and residential background likely to influence how an individual sees, engages with and experiences landscape (Adevi and Grahn 2012; Howard 2012).

One of the most commonly used dynamic approaches in landscape design and perception research has been ‘walking methodologies’, ‘accompanied visits’ or ‘go-

alongside' to consider people's senses of belonging to, working with and responses to different landscapes, spaces and places (Jones et al. 2008; Ward-Thompson 2012). For Moles, (quoted at length at the outset of this paper) in her work on local residents understandings of Phoenix Park, Dublin (2008) 'Walking is a wonderful way of gathering data' (1), whilst Jones et al. (2008) proposes that walking methods enable 'naturally occurring conversation' (3) to arise. Such quotes are, at least partially, indicative of how walking methods have been celebrated for offering the researcher new spaces of inquiry and disclosure unavailable to traditional 'sit down' interview formats or other forms of static participant consultation (Kusenbach 2003; Moles 2008). Where it has been identified that walking methods are useful because they capitalize on the environment as a prompt to discussion, without the researcher having to rely on photos or other objects brought into the interview room (see Anderson, 2004; Scott et al. 2009) and aid the development of rapport between researcher and researched (Kusenbach 2003; Allen 2004; Anderson 2004).

Furthermore, in work that might be broadly categorised as treating landscape primarily as 'scenery' such walking methods in conjunction with audio transcription, GPS and video cameras have also been praised for enabling the researcher to collect real-time, multi-sensory information about responses to the physical features of a landscape (Jones et al. 2008; Scott et al. 2009). For example, Jones et al. (2008) describe how they explore international student's responses to the redesign of urban landscapes in central Birmingham through walking interviews and a GPS system that connected what people said to where exactly they said it. Proposing that the use of a fixed route and prescriptive questions set can quickly generate a 'significant data set' (Jones et al. 2008, 1).

However, stating that walking methods open up new spaces of disclosure, aid rapport and enable new knowledge of landscape has become somewhat of a methodological orthodoxy. People rarely simply traverse the surface of a landscape and respond to it as 'scenery' or 'amenity' in fact to do so is often a privilege afforded to just a minority of powerful observers (Cosgrove 1984; Olwig 2002). Furthermore, a walking methodology is not simply an enhanced participatory approach to recording landscape experience or perception. Walking methods do not simply 'reveal' people's lived perceptions or responses, nor do they unproblematically open up new

spaces of disclosure. Rather, walking and walker's bodies bring with them their own politics, cultures, histories, habitual responses and lived experiences that must be taken into account (Edensor 2000; Edensor 2010; Heddon 2010; Myers 2011). As Frey (1998) writes in her reflections on the movements of Santiago pilgrims "Pilgrimage, like all human movement is patterned according to societal norms, lifestyles, class values, fashion and cultural ideals" (Frey 1998, 27).

Therefore, in this paper I show how walking is not only a method to gain knowledge of landscape, but rather landscape (as an idea, a space and an experience) affects the walk and thus the methodology. It should be noted that the paper does not offer a comprehensive review of walking methods in landscape research. Rather, the paper aims to draw on work from a range of relevant disciplines to offer some critical insights into the use of walking methods and accompanied visits. I propose a relational approach to conceptualising landscape and then proceed to identify some features of the walk and the walker's body that should be given critical consideration when using this approach. These include; the rhythm and style of the walk, the walk route terrain and distance and the fitness and embodied dispositions of the walker. Finally, I call into question the presumed utility of 'rapport', 'conviviality' and 'positive dispositions' that leisure walks and research walks are often thought to create. In so doing this paper offers some critical insights for researchers of landscape who are considering adopting a walking methodology

Defining landscape: a relational approach

First, it should be noted that researchers of landscape who have utilised walking methods have adopted a variety of approaches to defining landscape, from considering landscape primarily as external physical object or scenery (Adevi and Grahn 2012; Scott et al. 2009) to more relational and process orientated definitions that have emerged from cultural geography and anthropology in recent years (see Wylie 2007; Dawney 2013). Relational approaches to landscape are particularly useful in the context of work that adopts a walking methodology because they emphasise the complex interdependent nature of landscape as an idea and as an experience. Placing an emphasis on how space is '...open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always in becoming' (Massey 2005, 59).

Relational approaches have built on both insights from phenomenology and philosophies of vitalism (see Wylie 2007; Crouch, 2010). For example, anthropologist Ingold (2000) critiques approaches to landscape which treat landscape as simply 'background', 'scenery' or 'system of representation'. Instead drawing on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger he argues that '...the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them' (193). And with reference to Bruegel's (1565) painting 'The Harvesters' Ingold proceeds to state that '... through the exercises of descending and climbing, and their different muscular entailments, the contours of the landscape are not so much measured as felt – they are directly incorporated into our bodily experience' (203). Thus in the walking experience of these farm workers '...meanings are not attached to landscape but are gathered from it' (205). In this context landscape comes to be known relationally through the practice of walking. Where walking offers an immersed and embodied sense of landscape - an alternative to the 'disembodied view' characteristic of scenic and picturesque landscape taste (Wallace 1993). However, it is important to be wary of a notion of landscape as purely defined through our bodily relations with it because there is no singular 'authentic' embodied apprehension of the physical landscape, that purely phenomenological approaches can reveal (Crouch 2010).

When building a relational approach to landscape it is also important to be aware of the way landscape comes about through specific historical conditions, subjectivities, embodied experiences, techniques of walking and relationships. As Crouch writes in his article on 'thinking landscape relationally' '....The emergent landscape evoked in any one location may bear traces of other, earlier experiences there and elsewhere, merging the ways in which landscape happens, relationally' (Crouch 2010,13). Therefore in the rest of this paper I outline some of the specific ways in which landscape comes about relationally through walking practices and the circumstances which frame these encounters.

Moving bodies, rhythms and styles

Whilst prior research has proposed that walking may facilitate 'naturally occurring conversation' (Jones et al 2008, 1). We cannot assume that participants will be able to all walk in the same ways at the same pace or that anything approaching a

'naturally occurring conversation' will arise. A person's level of fitness, well-being and capacity to enjoy walking are contingent on their embodiment (Chubb 2014). Whilst for those disabled since birth, through ill health, old age or war, walking cannot be taken for granted (Oliver 1993). It is therefore important that anyone adopting a walking methodology takes the specific bodily capacities of the people they are engaging with into account. For example, Pink (2007), in her video and walking interview work with visitors to 'Green Lanes Community Gardens' in Haringey, London, shows the ways in which walking methods both open up and close down particular avenues of conversation depending on the route and how specific bodies (aged, disabled, gendered) experience this landscape in different ways (Pink 2007).

Furthermore, conversational and physical routes are also likely to be contingent on researcher relationships and rapport (Pile 2010), linguistic and cultural understanding and exchange (Myers 2011), gender dynamics/ legacies (Heddon and Turner 2010) and the possible routes that are permitted through a particular landscape (Bender and Winer 2001; Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Prior research has also shown the ways in which walking in the British rural landscape can be a disciplinary practice, with its own performative norms and values and more readily accepted topics of conversation (Darby 2000; Edensor 2000). For example, my ethnographic work on walkers in the Lakes and Peaks revealed the ways that adopting a cheerful disposition helped participants be regarded as part of the group (Macpherson 2008).

It is also important to keep in mind that the same walk can mean very different things to different people (Heddon and Porter 2014). People may saunter, amble, march or wander for a range of embodied, political, emotional or philosophical reasons. In Europe and particularly France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, different styles and practices of walking in the city have at times been crucial components of broader aesthetic, political and philosophical movements. Such traditions of European urban walking include: the nineteenth century 'Flaneur' (a disinterested observer of the urban scene); the Dadaist 'event' (which grew out of a disaffection with Western culture after the first world war); the Surrealists' 'deambulations' (walks in the city which emphasized a loss of conscious control and submission to risk and chance); and the Situationist '*derives*' (unplanned journeys

through mainly urban landscapes) (Basset 2004). Such walking traditions point toward a whole range of different potentials, styles and motivations of the walker that continue to have a significant legacy for art based forms of walking practice today and for how walking methods are sometimes conceptualized (Pinder 2011).

It is also worth noting that the Situationists' work on walking and De Certeau's (1984) classic essay 'Walking in the City' drew attention to the relational qualities of walker and landscape, opening up new understandings of timespace. For example, from the vantage point of the World Trade Centre in New York, De Certeau, describes how walkers select and fragment the space traversed, so that while certain spaces are condemned to inertia through walker choices, other spaces are magnified by the recall of certain features, events, sonic or olfactory presences. In this way De Certeau shows how walking through an urban landscape results in the magnification of certain sites through memory and practice, making them more significant than their spatial geometry might imply. This creates a topology of walked space which relates to, but is not the equivalent of, the cities topography.

Route, terrain and distance

In both urban and rural contexts, the route and distance covered during any research using walking methods is also an important consideration when adopting a walking methodology. The exertion and concentration that is required to cover the terrain will affect participant's responses and experiences. For example, prior research by Lorimer and Lund (2003), builds on Ingold's (2000) definition of landscape as embodied and shows how for the average able-bodied hiker in the Scottish Highlands the thoughts and chatter of a day in the hills may emerge in quite particular ways. On flat terrain, walkers start off with ease and are able to talk easily for little concentration is directed at the terrain. However, as walkers ascend or the path becomes more difficult, breath becomes laboured, bodies and mind tire and concentration is turned to navigating more difficult terrain, rather than discussion (Lorimer and Lund 2003). Thus the terrain as well as the practice of walking itself can influence our experience of landscape and the direction and content of our thoughts. This generates what Solnit (2000) refers to as an '....odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it.' (5)

On a long or challenging walk the walker may no longer be thinking about the physical landscape in a cognitive, reflective way. For example, Wylie's (2005) auto-ethnographic work draws attention to this mode of experiencing and embodying landscape in his work on walking the South West Coast Path in Britain. He shows the way the landscape 'comes into being' through embodied experience of the terrain. Here, traversing the landscape on foot results in an embodied experience of landscape that also subverts any sense of landscape as being solely about scenery: the landscape is embodied through blisters and exhaustion. However, such an understanding of the embodied quality to the landscape relationship raises methodological challenges for researchers. How can we attempt to document this often non-verbal, felt element of landscape experience and convey it to research audiences?

Slavin (2003) also takes an ethnographic approach in his research with contemporary pilgrim walkers to Santiago de Compostela where he identifies how the physical practice and rhythm of walking produces some very specific socio-embodied qualities to the pilgrim experience. Through participating as a walking pilgrim himself and using auto-ethnographic accounts, he is able to describe first-hand the way that the pain of the previous days walking tends to dissipate as muscles warm up and the day progresses. He also shows how walking enables participants to engage in 'meditative practice' through '...concentrating on the action and rhythm of the walk' (Slavin 2003, 8). Thus, the rhythm and practice of walking allows participants to elevate themselves from the pain which tends to also be produced through long walks, while a walking ethnography allows specific embodied insights into these walking practices. Such work on pilgrimage may help us to explain why some people relish a steep climb whilst out walking for leisure or pilgrimage. In fact, Glucklich (2001) in his book *'Sacred Pain'* argues that the self-inflicted pain of the pilgrim is not madness, but rather it entails a form of embodied rationality. Where pain has the capacity to alter the consciousness or transform the identity of the participant; a transformation engendered through the neuro-chemical production of natural opiates which are released when in pain. Walking long distances quite literally changes the minds of the walkers – a point I return to on the final section on rapport and positive dispositions.

Whilst Slavin (2003) and Wylie (2002;2005) both use auto-ethnographic approaches combined with photography to further enhance our understanding of the relationality that exists between self and landscape, Pink (2007) advocates the use of video method. Where for example, in her video walking interview work with visitors to 'Green Lanes Community Gardens' she argues that less structured, ethnographic walking methods that are filmed and edited for an audience can help others develop sensory embodied (emplaced) understandings of another's experience (Pink 2007).

Embodied dispositions, authenticity and feelings of connectedness to landscape

The body has sometimes been regarded as a way in which to 'ground' understandings of landscape. Yet there are many ways in which the landscape can enter the embodied conscious and unconscious mind and these are historically specific and contingent on individual's particular practices (Crouch 2010). Thus researchers must remain reflective and critical of people's expressions of connectedness and authentic connection with landscape and avoid assuming that particular embodied experiences are in anyway more 'authentic' than others. For example, Frey (1998) discusses how many Santiago pilgrims see bus and car travel as 'inauthentic' and regard their walking and cycling practices as giving them a more authentic connection to the physical landscape they pass through and to the divine, yet there is no necessary connection here.

Thrift (2000) speculates that increasingly popular practices such as yoga and pilates effect how participants walk and apprehend nature. This is because practices such as yoga promote and value the 'intensification of present experience' and thus are thought to be producing a new 'stance to feeling life' (Thrift 2000, 45-46). Where these body practices stretch out particular experiential moments in time by paying detailed attention to them. Thrift argues that such body practices contribute to the creation of what he refers to as 'territories of becoming' – a set of embodied dispositions which may be 'biologically wired in', 'culturally sedimented' and which give rise to an 'embodied unconscious' that involves certain habits of movement and engagement (Thrift, 2000c).

Thrift's speculation that contemporary body practices such as yoga now effect how nature might be apprehended by leisure visitors is important because it begins to draw further attention to the way even embodied responses to landscape are not pure biological affect (are not 'authentic' in any unmediated way) but rather are culturally influenced and historically specific. His insights help us to reflect on what it is to 'apprehend the landscape' and how participatory, verbal methods may not always be an adequate way in which to attend to particular historically and culturally sedimented embodied dispositions. Interestingly, Dawney (2013) in her work on walking along the Jurassic Coast, Dorset in Britain takes these sorts of arguments further to explain the recent development of a range of landscape practices adopted in Britain that facilitate a 'feeling of connectedness' with nature. She argues that it is important to deconstruct expressions of attachment to particular cultural landscapes and deconstruct the lived experience of authenticity and connection that practices such as walking for pleasure generate. Instead she argues that we need to demonstrate their historically conditional nature and maintain an awareness of how certain forms of walking practice generate a '....specific mode of being and feeling connected that is experienced in terms of both nation and class.' (Dawney, 2013, 89)

Rapport and positive dispositions

Walking methods have been praised for enabling enhanced researcher rapport, facilitating shared experience and enhanced sociable group dynamics (Ward-Thomson 2012). However, walking methods that involve a 'pleasurable walk' are likely to inject a certain positivity into the research relationship that it is important the researcher remains alert to. After twenty minutes of brisk walking by the average adult, endorphins will begin to be released and cardio-vascular and muscular fitness will begin to be built and felt (Lamb et al. 2002). Walking outdoors is likely to involve the mood enhancing effects of daylight and thermoregulation, and increased social contact is also thought to lead to an enhanced sense of well-being and self esteem (Morgan et al. 2010). Thus the endorphins and sense of well-being that are generated in the walking body are likely to contribute to a positive disposition in the walker and a greater likelihood of dispelling negative thoughts (Morgan et al. 2010). Whilst individual bodies will respond differently to a walk these potentially mood enhancing effects of the walk also gives walkers a sense of something collective that they have all experienced together.

This 'affective commonality' (McCormack, 2007) of group walking experiences is likely to have both biological and culturally sedimented roots. Group walking can be useful as a means of building rapport with participants and can be politically useful if seeking to work across communities of people that are often separated or regard themselves as having little 'in common' (O'Neill 2008) it is also a wonderful potential health benefit of walking. However, these positive aspects of walking methods may mean that research participants give somewhat upbeat and partial accounts of themselves and the landscapes they are passing through. Thus it is important to be alert to the positive dispositions, that pleasurable walks generate, occlude and reveal – an issue that is partially addressed in a paper on the laughter of walkers in the Lake District and Peak District (Macpherson 2008). As a hiker or Rambler, expressing love of a particular physical landscape may, in part, be an expression of the love of a landscape's particularly suitable affordances or the particular endorphins that are released whilst traversing it. Thus researchers need to be aware of the way in which a methodological choice such as walking will be more likely to generate certain positive dispositions amongst those with an affinity to walking practice and result in people traversing certain elements of their mind over other elements.

Conclusions

Prior research has shown how walking methods may open up new spaces of disclosure and enhance rapport between research subjects. However, in this paper I have shown how walking methods can also close down certain possible research avenues (through performative norms associated with walking in certain areas or through the endorphin induced highs associated with walking outdoors) or limit who is likely to participate (not everyone can walk or would choose to participate in a walk). Thus walking is not a benign or neutral approach to researching landscape. Rather it is a method of opening up relational spaces of self and landscape. Embodied dispositions, endorphins, pace and rhythm, terrain, cultural practices and symbolic histories all give shape to a walker's experience of the physical landscape - giving form to the varied 'natural' and 'cultural' ways in which landscape comes into being as a material, embodied and discursive domain (cf. Rose 2002). Landscape researchers need to understand some of these diverse characteristics and embodied features of walking practices and modes of apprehending landscape prior to utilising

walking methods. For walking entails both the endorphin induced highs of exercise and the socio-embodied habits, disciplinary norms and conventions of all collective acts. A critical approach to researching landscape through walking methods that recognizes these challenges helps the researcher of landscape retain a greater fidelity to the complex relationality of landscape as multiple, interdependent and always in becoming .

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