4 Linking Ages

Developing Walking Methods for Lifecourse Research

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Introduction

I work in human geography, where my work has so far focused on later life. This chapter embraces the *Linking Ages* approach by analysing and discussing approaches which explore the early stages of our biographies. This writing engages with the messiness of our relationships with time in two ways: firstly, showing that biographical accounts do not have to follow a strictly chronological order (Neale, 2015); and secondly illustrating how geographical perspectives provide insights into how place mediates the rhythms and movement involved in ageing (Barron, 2021; Lager et al., 2016). The methods include a conventional outdoor walking interview and two more experimental approaches, including a sat-down imagined walk of the mind and a development of the latter approach using digital maps.

A key theme of this chapter is to consider how place mediates the cultural, economic, and societal phenomena of a certain époque. The first case person explores teenage in 1970s Britain from a middle-class perspective. The second individual discusses her working-class childhood in 1960s northern England and aspiring towards a different life during the 1970s. The third person is one generation older and born in working-class Wales. She reveals the significance of buying a first house in the 1960s. Whilst present-day researchers of childhood places – such as Ergler (2020) – can observe these environments for themselves, it can be hard to build a picture of places in the past. In each of the three cases, I explore the social and cultural contexts – the *feeling and moods* (Highmore, 2017) – important to the interviewee's biography. Though many participant will offer explanations during a conversation, some post-interview analysis will help. In particular, I explain how exploring the affective dimension of memories and emotions – similar to what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2011) calls long-term attachments to feelings from the past – can help to understand contexts. For example, whilst the importance of the coal industry to one participant's childhood may seem innocuous, analysis shows that these experiences are fundamental to that person's social class and identity. Altogether this collection of subtle methods explore how early experiences and prevailing cultures can define values and mindsets important to later life. However, I accept that this accounts only a limited sample and that social and economic contexts will differ for people from other countries and different time periods.

Initially I present some theories which bring the walking body to lifecourse research, before relating the importance of place to biography. The three walking methods are then discussed in order, starting with a conventional outdoor walking interview, the sat-down walk of the mind, and an online walking technique. An element of this writing is to reflect on how data gained from one-to-one biographical interviews can be developed into formats which allow the public to enter the sensual experiences of others (Vannini, 2015). I present

a walking tour and a paid commission with dramatists and artists to make a short film. This playful approach furthers *Linking Ages*' desire to develop empathy between generations.

The importance of the walking body to exploring the lifecourse

This chapter offers theories and methods from human geography to the *Linking Ages* approach. Firstly, a significant early exponent of human geography, Yi-Fu Tuan, argues in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) that we generally neglect the whole capacity of the body as a source of knowing. In the cases explored later in this writing, the embodied perspective of the walk to school or going to the shops reveal factors critical to Tuan's definition of *experience*; namely sensation, emotion and thought. Geographer Steve Pile (2010) writes about affects being held deep within the unconscious body and therefore not easy to sense. A possible solution is offered by Duff, who describes mobile proposals to uncover affects: 'to walk is to be affected by place and to simultaneously contribute to the ongoing co-constitution of self and place' (2010, p. 887). Methods that allow the walking body to unlock affects and memories are important. Linking to biography, Barad (2003) writes that movement can break down habits of discursive-material boundary-making to which people become accustomed. Barad (ibid., p. 809) cites poststructuralist Michel Foucault's writing about the biological and historical body not being consecutive: instead, they combine in new ways with technologies. I would clarify that technologies, including medicines and machines, perhaps change the expected order of what people can do at certain ages. In one case I show how the technology of a digital walk allows people to retrace elements of their biography.

Walking approaches within gerontology and ageing studies are advocated by cultural geographer Amy Barron. She finds that a preoccupation with the older body and 'focusing on physiological experience alone risks overlooking how the capacities of individuals can alter on a momentary basis, affecting the degree to which someone understands themselves as older' (2021, p. 666). Barron's proposal centres on the more-than-representational and affect based methods (Anderson & Harrison, 2010) which turn attention away from representational meaning and towards cultural geographic concerns, performativity, and bodily practices. Barron argues that this group of approaches help researchers to understand when older age emerges as a category in people's lives – or not. The aim of her work is to understand 'the diverse ways older age is *lived* [italics intended], and how what the category means ebbs and flows in relation with different places, and the events that constitute the making of those places' (2021, p. 666). Indeed, my three case studies reveal how being in certain places allows participants to present versions of themselves which are not obviously older people. This chimes with Stefan Hirschauer's thoughts regarding *un/doing difference*, where he questions the categories used to classify people, and argues that age 'is inherently transitory' (2021, p. 63). I now explain how a focus on place helps to explore different stages of the lifecourse.

Place and lifecourse approaches

This writing takes excerpts from in-depth interviews that explore three people's relationships with places over the lifecourse. The focus on youth and early adulthood means that some accounts portray places 'as emergent and heterogeneous entities, constituted in assemblages of bodies, materials and spaces from near and far, as well as characterised by shifting degrees of openness and stability' (Kullman, 2013, p. 884). Another theory of space

important to my approach is how geographer Doreen Massey writes that 'rather for time genuinely to be held open, space could be imagined as the sphere of the existence of multi-plicity, of the possibility of the existence of difference' (1999, p. 274). I interpret her work as meaning that we pivot our discussions around the specificity of spaces, such as a street or neighbourhood. This is clear in one case where the interviewee's accounts jump from child-hood to adulthood, to adolescence and back again. In effect time is of secondary importance to the participant and the conversation is led by the emotions and memories connected to a given space. A foundation for such thinking is found in existing qualitative longitudinal (QL) approaches:

> Defined as qualitative enquiry that is conducted through or in relation to time, QL re-search uses in-depth, situated enquiry, and a combination of thematic, case history and temporal analysis to discern how lives unfold. Designs are flexible and creative. Time can be built in prospectively, retrospectively, or through a combination of the two.
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> (Neale, 2015, p. 25)

Reflecting on time retrospectively is an important idea. The interviewees discussed in this chapter met me expecting to talk about their biographies. However, a chronological order seemed less important to one individual. Though this makes the interviews hard to compare, I would argue that the exceptions test methods and deepen our understanding of experience (Tuan, 1977). The next section centres on the physical act of walking and talking and how that connects with life stories.

Outdoor walking and biography

The walking interview gives people an opportunity to show and explore spaces important to their biography. The participant leading a walk overcomes the tendency of interviews to 'solicit stories which do not naturalistically occur in everyday life' – as noted by Ken Plummer and cited in Bornat (2008, p. 349). The interviewee has most agency where the interviewer shadows or follows; only observing rather than participating. Cases where the interviewer can ask questions are called a 'go-along' (Carpiano, 2009). Evans and Jones define the *participatory walking interview* (2011, p. 850) as a case where the route is determined by the interviewee and their biography, but the interviewee can walk along-side and ask questions. This latter principle guides the one-to-one interviews presented here. I pose questions as spaces unfold through the walk; what Evans and Jones describe as being 'framed by place' (2011, p. 849). Although this can result in the narrative mov-ing from one time to another, I found that interviewees are generally happy to explain the context.

Presented here is a selection from the outdoor walking interviews (*n* = 8) collected during my PhD is 2019. In practical terms, all walks are discussed beforehand either in person or over the telephone or by online meeting. The participant decides on the meeting point and the entire route. With prior consent, the route itself can be recorded and the audio mapped for further analysis through Geographical Information Systems (Jones & Evans, 2012). Be-yond audio recordings, photographs or short films can be taken where appropriate. All data is potentially useful. Amongst the eight interviews, I present a 90-minute walk with Stephen (pseudonym) as the spaces we walked elicited focused and reflective accounts of his teenage years. Of note, his attention to detail may potentially relate to him living in a different place during childhood and then through his adult life.

I met Stephen in the place where he moved aged ten, in 1970. We started our walk at a semi-detached house built in the late 1960s. He presented a middle-class life 'which revolved around home, school and church.' Stephen talked about the places we visited in a similar way to how Kullman writes about transitional geographies; namely '… the relational notions of childhood spaces, emphasising their porous, affective and materially diverse qualities' (2010, p. 842). Karen O'Rourke writes about such 'way-finding' exercises as ways of storing learning and memories, stressing the importance of places representing personal boundaries and emotional territories (2016, pp. 113–117). Taking a walk with Stephen as an older person seemed to allow the unfolding of memories and emotions. Broadly, the first third of Stephen's narrative was framed by making new friends, experimenting with new foods, and doing errands for his mother. At one point Stephen gestured towards the pubs 'down there' in the village centre and said that they would become part of his world in his later teens.

We entered this teenage world when we stopped next to a restaurant which Stephen explained had started up in the mid-1970s. He told me that clients went for business lunches which he said 'were seen as part of the business process.' Referring to the jobs of his friends' parents, he started to recall the wider employment landscape in the 1970s, based around steel production. For context, a large steel works was established near Stephen's home in the early 1960s and came to dominate the culture and economy of the town for some decades. From this opening Stephen recalled his own experience of holiday jobs washing up and waiting at a nearby pub; and articulated his own theory that managers from local industries took each other out for a 'slap up' lunch. He said 'And this has just utterly disappeared. I just don't think the idea that you would take people out for a three-course lunch works now – you know, a bottle of wine, coffee, and brandy, and then go back to work – is just bizarre. But it was a big thing.' The richness of Stephen's story illustrates an opportunity provided by the one-to-one walking method: the conversation flows, and the participant can retrieve deeply held memories and emotions. However, the interviewee can also return to the present, allowing them to reference the feeling and mood of the past and compare it to the present day. For example, Stephen reflected that going for the walk offered him a deeper understanding of the social, political, and economic context which had shaped his whole life.

Some months after the interview I was received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council's 2019 Festival of Science to stage a public event about life in the 1960s and 1970s. The event would include talks and a guided outdoor walk. I asked Stephen if he would lead sections of the walk. He agreed to revisit the same streets that we had visited and effectively re-enter his teenage memories to share them with other people. I now explain how the group walk provided playful and gentle opportunities to put such individual accounts into a form that others can explore.

A public walking tour connects individual stories to a wider context

There are excellent cases of researchers using public group walks, with approximately ten to twenty people, to explore the earlier lives of older people. Examples from cities in England include urban nostalgia (Adams & Larkham, 2015) and *Rescue Geography* (Jones & Evans, 2012). Though these walks can be educational, Evans and Jones highlight that 'the drawbacks of imposing a predetermined route [for research purposes] are that they contrive to make the interviewee do something beyond their normal routine' (2011, p. 850). In my case the walk would primarily present research findings, rather than aiming

to generate new interviews. Stephen would lead segments, thus bringing forward the perspective of somebody with long-standing connections to the place.

As we walked Stephen stopped at a specific locations. Though the shops and people had greatly changed, buildings triggered memories and feelings important to Stephen. We explored how consumption habits changed during the early to mid-1970s. He discussed how he would visit shops for this mother and give orders of groceries, meat and bread which were later brought to the house. He explained that this practice stopped in the late-1970s due to the rise of the supermarket and private motor cars. To the younger people on the walk, including myself, it was fascinating to understand how life had changed. The discussion amongst the group connected with a significant debate about whether the aspirations of those who grew up in 1960s and 1970s had been achievable for subsequent generations. There is much writing about this subject (Exley, 2019; Gilleard & Higgs, 2020; Goodhart, 2017) and the topic of improved living standards also features in the two other interviews within this chapter. Stephen summarised life in the era of his teenage years during the walking tour: 'This was a peak time for this area: probably full employment in the early seventies; good jobs, skilled jobs. And a lot of people, I suppose actually, in terms of almost fulfilling their dreams.' I referenced the aspirational mood that he conveyed when I named my PhD thesis *Pursuing the Post-war Dream* (Singleton, 2021).

To summarise, walking with Stephen offered the chance for the interviewee, interviewer, and other people on the public walk to gain deep insights about specific space and time. In the next section I present a complementary approach to physical walks.

Walk of the mind

The walk of the mind method involves a sat-down conversation where the interviewer and interviewee imagine, and follow, walking-paced journeys through geographical spaces. This can be used when distance, weather, lack of time or other reasons make an outdoor walk impossible. Within such conversations ($n = 8$) undertaken during my PhD, people offered photos, objects, names of streets, and other specific details which help to build a place narrative (Richardson, 2017). The *Biographical Mapping* toolkit authors (Tinkler et al., 2021, p. 2) underline how important this data can be:

> … the use of these already existing things, alongside talk based methods such as interviews, that enables participants to map out connections to place, space, and their associated memories and how they have changed in space and over time.

However, without people offering such clues interviews can be hard to understand. The example that I present is a case of somebody who was careful not to name the place where she grew up. To understand meaning from their account, I analysed the affective nature of language to explore feelings and social context. More broadly, this approach can help the researcher to understand the perspective of participants of different ages, including both older and younger – see Duff (2010) researching young people in Canada.

Jane (pseudonym) is a female of roughly the same age to Stephen. However, she was born in working-class northern England rather than a middle-class neighbourhood in Wales. We met in a quiet café and the conversation was recorded on a dictaphone. I asked her to describe where she grew up. She described a 'village which was predominantly two large housing estates; one of which was owned by the Coal Board and the other was a council estate. But it didn't really matter because everybody that lived there was the same.' The [National]

Coal Board was the state-owned organization which controlled the British coal mining industry at the time. Her father was a coal miner, and she called her home the *Pit Village* throughout our meeting. There is important context in her observation that 'everybody was the same.' Sociologist David Goodhart (2017, p. 6) writes that 'fixed locations and stable occupations' defined people's identities until the end of the 1960s, before gradually eroding in the following decades.

Jane moved her geographical focus from the village to her childhood home. Of note, she remembered the dirty process of moving coal from storage in the back garden and through the house to the kitchen, where her mother lit a fire every morning to heat the house. Words such as 'soot' or 'dust' and 'grime' were used to convey the aesthetic of solid fuel in the home. In adulthood she explained how she had always kept a clean house. The lack of cleanliness is potentially a case of what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart calls 'ordinary affects'; defined as 'at once abstract and concrete, ordinary affects are more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitious, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings' (2007, p. 3). Other writers advise that we look beyond obviously emotive terms such as 'sad' or 'delighted' to analyse the affects buried in language (Pile, 2010; Tamboukou, 2003). In her account Jane explained that coal dust was everywhere and that clothes would get covered in a black dust even when they were put outside to dry.

The aesthetic of coal is importance to *Linking Ages* as an example of an everyday culture, similar to the three-course business lunches previously described by Stephen, that had stopped by the time subsequent generations grow up. Indeed, coal was important to many elements of everyday life during the 1960s. Across the United Kingdom this solid fuel was used to power steam trains, heat houses, cook food, and to generate the local gas supply. Her account hints at how coal made life dirty and potentially less healthy compared to the present day.

Altogether Jane's oral description of walking through her childhood house helped me to imagine life in the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps wanting to protect anonymity, she rarely talked about other people directly. Instead, her walk revealed many non-human factors which 'assemble the social and cultural' (Spinney, 2016, p. 234) such as furniture and objects. Jane changed emphasis a little, and included other people, when she presented what happened to her aged 11 as she started attending grammar school some distance away. We left and house and imagined a walk to the bus stop. This journey featured other children making fun of her because very few of them went to this selective – and perhaps aspirational – kind of school. She recalled that 'I had to wear a uniform which was maroon and yellow. And I stuck out like a sore thumb.' She stated that she did not have 'fond memories,' which suggests that traumatic feelings are still attached to that space. Jane's examples of past feelings, explicitly connected to certain spaces, connects with the geographical study of phenomena which are beyond representation (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). Within the latter field, there is emerging study of walking and older age – such as the previously cited worked by Amy Barron – that is foundation for my own work.

Returning to Jane, her journey to school connects to established research findings within childhood studies. For example, 'for children, exploring the gap between self and other takes place through transitional phenomena – spaces, materials and practices that help one to switch between private and public worlds' (Kullman, 2010, p. 833). A further transition in Jane's life was the only time she named the location and also presented colour photographs. She illustrated a place to which she first visited as a teenager and recalled a bus journey away to the *Lakes* in northern England. This was described in her own terms as a significant biographical 'life event' – see more in Bornat (2008, p. 346). The openness of the

geographical vistas conveyed a general widening of horizons in a social sense and perhaps related to *aspiration* (Gilleard & Higgs, 2020, pp. 13–15) or *optimism* (Berlant, 2011). Seemingly many of Jane's strongest lifelong friendships are connected to her 'happy place' in the *Lakes*. She moved away to a university in southern England aged 18 and stayed in the same area for over 40 years. In the final third of the discussion Jane reflected back on the *Pit Village*, where her parents had remained tenants in the same council-owned house until their deaths. She described how her husband loves the place, but for her:

> … the sooner we get away the better. So, my attachment to that Pit Village is a negative. I don't want to have to go there, but I do because my brother is there; but I'm so glad to be on the motorway!

These negative childhood and teenage experiences seem to have an ongoing power which has lasted four or five decades. What seems striking from Jane's overall account, in a conversation of around 50 minutes, is a broad range of both negative and positive emotions revealed by going to specific places in her imagination. I gained greater insights from listening again to her oral account and also noting her tone of voice. With more resource, and the relevant permission, filming such an interview may provide been further opportunities to analyse facial expressions and body language.

In summary, this latter example of the walk of the mind gave the interviewee a large degree of control. Jane followed a chronological narrative to the life-course (Katz et al., 2012). As such, it differed somewhat from the outdoor walking interviews as being in specific places did not change her direction. The chronological order may also have been for my benefit; helping me to relate an unfamiliar place and time – especially as I had no visual accounts of the house and *Pit Village* that she described – to stages from my own lifecourse. In other walks of the mind people were specific about places. For example, I met one man who worked in the steel works near to Stephen's home and a woman who went to the same school, and so complemented his accounts.

In the next case study, I reflect on an approach which develops the walk of the mind. Again, participants do not walk in an embodied physical sense, but use online visual representations of the geographies relevant to their biography. I also present how these accounts can be developed into a different public educational resources by working with artists and making films.

Spatially led digital walk

This method of digital interviewing involves a participant taking a journey at walking pace through an online space (Woolham, 2020). This approach emerged partly due to the need for new participatory methods during COVID-19 pandemic (Hall et al., 2021) and older people experimenting with online spaces (Galčanová Batista et al., 2022). The conversation is recorded as a video which includes moving images and audio as the participants follow lines on the virtual ground. Sometimes participants will add text through the chat function. Of the digital interviews trialled (*n* = 3) I recall an interview with Pat. Her case is interesting as she embraced the opportunity to use the online map and move frequently between stages of the lifecourse: childhood, teenage, early adulthood, middle age, and also through older age.

Pat was two decades older than Stephen and Jane and was already an independent adult in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Similar to the case of producing Stephen's biographical account into a public walk, Pat's story would be developed into publicly available

format – this time an educational film. As Pat would be involved in the film project, she allowed her real name and likeness to be used. Of note, the participant information sheet, consent form, media release form, and three edited video extracts are publicly available through the UK Data Service (Singleton, 2023). We used a Zoom online meeting where I was in my home office and where Pat was at home. Once we had discussed the participant information sheet and Pat had emailed a signed the consent form, a filmed recording of the meeting commenced. We started with me asking her when she had moved to Newport, in Wales, which is where Stephen was a teenager. She explained that she and her then husband had relocated to Newport, aged in their early 20s, from a privately rented flat in southwest London during 1963. I opened a Google Maps window for us both to see. We moved our sight to the street where Pat had lived. We then used the function in Google Earth which allows the viewer to gradually move along a street as if walking. I did not explicitly ask about the experience of how it felt to walk virtually and so the account centres more on accessing memories and emotions.

As Pat experienced this street, she recalled how the move had given them a chance to live in a modern house for the first time. She described how she had 'felt like she was in paradise.' The positive attachment was clear in her tone of voice as our virtual bodies navigated the street on the screen. Pat recalled how 'The house was lovely. If I could have picked it up and moved it, then I would have been very pleased.' I asked her why she liked it so much. She said 'It was modern. We moved out of a Victorian house in London. We had the top floor, and it didn't have any heating.' Pat brough her embodied experience of being in the previous house, where she said: 'It was freezing cold, and we had draughts everywhere. And then we came to this little house. And it was snug and warm, and we had central heating.' The longer description about the new house involved words such as 'modern' and 'easy' and the aspirational nature of it being 'a huge step forward.' She described being able to touch the house and to know that it was hers, rather than a rented property. Moving to this house was clearly a significant transition in her life.

The literature shows that Pat was not unusual in acquiring a private home in that decade. Between 1961 and 1971 the proportion of owner-occupied houses in England and Wales climbed from 43% to 49% (Lund, 2017, p. 46). As such the 1960s set down aspirations that Stephen referred to on the walking tour and experienced by Jane when she went to grammar school. Without turning this writing into a deep study of post-war Britain, I repeat the importance of the researcher finding ways to make sense of the social and economic context described by the interviewee. For example, Pat living in a house with gas central heating in the 1960s contrasts sharply to Jane's account of a house heated by coal fire. With reference to future research, different issues of poverty, health and inequality are likely to emerge from discussions about the home and neighbourhood life experienced in other decades. For example, digital exclusion, lack of public transport and social isolation.

The remainder of the conversation with Pat moved backwards and forwards in dates. For example, a conversation about air pollution in Newport during the 1990s reminded Pat of the industrial town where she had been a child in the 1950s. We moved location and she took me for a five-minute along a street where she walked often as a teenager. Following this road reminded her of a motorway being built through her hometown, which then linked her back to a different part of Newport where she lived in the 1970s. The conservation changed to a different point in Pat's lifecourse: aged in her 30s when she became involved in local politics and campaigned against homes being demolished to make way for roads. As we moved around digital maps of Newport, she led me to a multi-purpose central library building. I asked her when this was built, and she told me that it was the day when her son

was born – in April 1968. I will return to this story as Pat appears in the collaborative film project with a theatre company. In the meantime, I explore how the conversation with Pat builds the concept that periods of the lifecourse have certain rhythms.

Geographers Lager et al. (2016) write about rhythms, ageing and neighbourhoods. In particular, they explore different spaces in Groningen, a city of 200,000 people in the Netherlands. The concept of rhythmanalysis is important as they cite Lefebvre's (2004) thought that the body is the starting point which acts as a metronome: 'each must appreciate rhythms by referring them to oneself' (ibid., p. 1571). For example, Jane previously remembered the rhythm of her walk to the school bus in the 1970s being disrupted by name-calling. Beyond geography, political scientist Cameron Duff studies connections to spaces made during teenage life through repeated activities such as skateboarding (2010). Bren Neale, a specialist in lifecourse and family research, goes beyond teenage life and describes a qualitative concept of temporality where:

> … time is not fixed but fluid, rhythmically and perpetually emerging in multidimensional ways in varied local contexts. Objective, constant, one-dimensional clock time gives way to a plurality of times, held in a simultaneous relationship with each other, flowing and intersecting in complex and unpredictable ways.
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> (2015, p. 33)

The spatially led digital interview with Pat seems to demonstrate a plurality of times and connections made through different places. For example, topics that arose from certain spaces, such as pollution and motorways. The digital interview technique allowed her to move place as she explored her thoughts, and therefore revealed other periods of the lifecourse. Pat's story suggests that past and future are processes which flow into each other; supporting Neale (2015) stating that time can be seen as circular rather than linear and that it unfolds in a '… recursive (self-referential) loop, such that before and after lose their meaning' (ibid., p. 34).

The spatially led digital approach develops the walk of the mind as it brings a visual dimension to the exploration of biography. Unlike the meeting with Jane, the researcher gains geographical context by seeing the name of places on Google Earth. This exercise also helps interviewees move between different versions of themselves – see similar perspectives from research using walking interviews in Manchester (Barron, 2019). There are disadvantages to moving the conversation backwards and forwards in time, as the (un)folding results in a fragmented account. However, in Pat's case we played on this messiness in a subsequent collaboration with a theatre company during 2022. A brief description of this art project is the final element of the three techniques discussed.

Public theatre project builds on digital interviews

Similar to the public walk with Stephen, site-specific outdoor performances can bring research to life (Smith, 2018). The process of making public theatre from my interviews started with a *data session* (Hindmarsh & Tutt, 2012, pp. 58–61) where producers and actors were shown recordings of Pat's interview and other materials. An actor called Matt responded to Pat's story with a fictional characters who was seemingly in both the 1960s and the present day. Captured in a film about the project (Thomas, 2022) Matt interviewed Pat as if making a contemporary newsreel from the late-1960s.

Matt asked Pat about the recent (April 1968) opening of Newport Library. Pat seemed to re-enter the mind and body of herself as a mother who had recently given birth; responding that she was not actually there but had some interesting anecdotes. Although she stumbled slightly to maintain her perspective of speaking from the past rather than the present, she voiced the political mission which was important to her at the time: namely that the new library development should be accessible to people who use public transport. Promoting the perspective of property developers, Matt explained that the decision about buses and car parks would depend on the planning committee. Pat responded playfully, saying 'Alright. I will be watching with interest.'

Biographical accounts, such as Pat's, represent how we connect with differently aged versions of ourselves. I would argue that this is what makes these interviews so rich and wonderful. Furthermore, I found that developing something performative and playful, and to create a film, embraced that lack of structure in Pat's account. These artistic partnerships demand time, funding, and only succeed when the researcher relinquishes some control (Singleton, 2024). Moreover, this last example brings digital communications and interdisciplinary collaborations to the research dynamic. As such, this leads to the conclusions from what these methods offer to develop a *Linking Ages* approach.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have gone beyond established outdoor biographical walking interview methods (Adams & Larkham, 2015; Barron, 2019; Jones & Evans, 2012) and developed two innovative walking techniques to reflect on earlier stages of the lifecourse. I revisit the methods discussed in this chapter in order and reflect on links to childhood research. The first case, with outdoor walks, revealed a degree of chronological order. For example, Stephen presented a mostly time-ordered narrative as he illustrated his teenage years in a walk from his home towards school, and then to place where he worked. By coming into the present, he gained retrospective insights into the moods and feelings of the world where he grew up (Berlant, 2011; Highmore, 2017). Though outdoor walking methods are used with children in the present day (Kullman, 2010), other writing about childhood spaces reveals that urban environments are more car-reliant and highly mobile than before (Ergler, 2020, p. 312). The less walkable nature of environments may therefore influence the depth of spatially held memories and emotions that modern children acquire. In the second case, a walk of the mind with Jane relied on clear verbal descriptions. Analysing the affective quality of the language (Tamboukou, 2003) revealed her teenage years in 1960s and 1970s Britain as a time when relationships with space changed greatly. In more recent research Duff (2010) studies the role of affect and practice in transitional spaces for young people. The third case, a digital interview with Pat, was more clearly framed by space (Evans & Jones, 2011) than the first two approaches. Pat had freedom to move between locations, which helped demonstrate Hirschauer's (2021) concept of *un/doing difference* as she linked to very different periods in her lifecourse. Having a visual representation of places was useful to conducting the conversation and also   helped with the theatre project. This method may have great potential for contemporary children and young people, for whom online spaces are a more regular feature of everyday life.

In summary, I agree with Neale (2015) that biographies do not have to be explored following a strictly chronological order. Instead, I hope these detailed examples encourage other researchers to embrace the benefits and pitfalls to research the lifecourse using spatial

approaches. Moreover, I trust that developing accounts into public walking events and performative projects such as the film can link between ages; presenting biographies in playful ways so empathy develops between people. I am already starting to use these techniques in new research. For example, I am currently using the spatially led digital walk with groups of younger and older people as they explore perceptions and imaginaries of climate change (Thomas et al., 2023). The ease of storing data digitally could allow longitudinal data, so the children of today can meet themselves again when they are older.

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