Title

Making something out of nothing: breaching everyday life by standing still in a public place

1. **Introduction**

A performance collective 'freezes' in a busy train station. On a high street, a gold-painted 'living statue' holds a pose, expectantly hoping for a passer-by to put money in their tin. Hundreds of climate activists take part in a 'die in', bringing a busy city centre to a 'standstill'. During a memorial service, mourners stand silently for eight minutes and forty six seconds, remembering and protesting the death of George Floyd.

Being still publicly matters, arguably now more than ever; yet we understand little of what happens when people are still and 'do nothing' in public. Public displays of stillness are increasingly found in contemporary life; yet are seldom examined as social phenomena in their own right. It is rarer still to find empirical studies of these bodily practices in sociology. The examples above bear a family resemblance to our topic of investigation. Occasions of public stillness and silence might be designed in particular ways, to achieve particular purposes; for example, to create a sense of a performance, protest, or enact remembrance, perhaps with an onlooking recipient audience. Whether resistant or conservative, disruptive or nationalistic, entertaining or banal, political, liberative, healing, or just playful, displays of immobility, stillness and silence in public are globally relevant and demand sociological attention.

This article engages in micro-sociological investigation of brief occasions where groups of people stand still, 'do nothing', and how passers-by turn this 'nothing' into a 'something'. We contribute an empirical study to emerging social studies of immobility, stillness, rest and 'nothing' (Bissell & Fuller, 2013; Callard *et al*., 2016; Scott, 2018, 2019). We analyse members' encountering and negotiating people apparently 'doing nothing' and provide a granular description of the bodily practices (gesture, gaze, modes of walking) employed in noticing, and adopting what we call an 'audiencing' stance towards people momentarily standing motionless. We will show how, in this case, our experiment potentially disrupts category relations between audience and performer, and why this

matters. We analyse video recordings of bodily conduct taken from a series of breaching experiments – conducted by academics and university students in various locations – in which a group of 'performers', in a relatively simple sense, 'do nothing', by silently standing still for 10 minutes in a pedestrianized shopping street in Cardiff. The field experiment took place within a first year undergraduate course in social psychology; *Doing Nothing in a Busy Place: A Flashmob Breaching Experiment* has taken place annually since 2015, with around 150 students and two or three staff members.

In what follows, we firstly review breaching experiments and previous studies of freeze 'performances', before discussing the practicalities of the experiment in more detail. We then describe our observations and analysis. Across three analytic sections, we show how a specific way of being still and 'doing nothing' in public space is made to matter, and show how bystanders breach the accountability of the apparent 'performance' *as a performance*. We show how bystanders and passers-by make use of specific bodily practices to encounter, navigate and notice the potentially unexpected, unusual and subtly disruptive stillness.

We conclude by reflecting on some of the socio-cultural, methodological, pedagogic, and political implications of our ethnomethodological study.

2. Breaching experiments, ethnomethodology, and occasioned categories

Our field experiment is primarily influenced by the 'breaching' tutorials of Harold Garfinkel (1967 [1984]). Breaching experiments have become recognised methodological interventions in the teaching of ethnomethodology. They are instructive in making visible the everyday production of social 'normality' by disrupting, and thus exposing, shared background expectancies and methods at play in the accomplishment of commonplace activities, such as having a conversation. Garfinkel (1967 [1984]: 37) suggests: "start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble." He instructed his students to haggle for fixed price items at a supermarket check-out, act like a lodger in their family home, or cheat at a game. The playfully disruptive breaches and their potentially distressing consequences led Alvin Gouldner (1971, p. 394) to describe Garfinkel's strategy as a "genteel anarchism". We revisit the breaching experiment as a serious, yet still potentially

'fun', intervention and way of investigating the social world, beyond its appearance within popular 'prank' culture, and develop its use as a basic pedagogic device to teach "Sociology 101" (Rafalovich, 2006).

Our breaching experiment aimed to disrupt the 'familiar scene' of urban public space. We were influenced by McGrane's (1994) "Un-occupied, Un-employed" task, in which he instructed his students to stand still in a busy social setting and 'do nothing' for ten minutes. His so-called "Zen Sociology" instructions resemble those given for standing or sitting meditation in a class of Zen Buddhism, Tai Chi, Qigong, or mindfulness. We were further inspired by the performance art of Marina Abramovic[1], meditation as a portable "self-laboratory" (Varela *et al.*, 1991), and Adbusters'[2] "subvertising" (Figure 1). Our breaching experiment somewhat resembles - and (as we shall see) might, in turn, disrupt understandings of - a range of popular, artistic, activist and (social) scientific practices. These include flash mobs (Molnár, 2014), social experiments, and use of meditation, prayer and silence in acts of protest (e.g. #BlackLivesMatter, Dakota Access Pipeline, Extinction Rebellion, Occupy Wall Street; see Rowe, 2016), public remembrance, or collective mourning.

Figure 1: Adbusters

In one sense, our field experiment aimed to 'breach' taken-for-granted ways of participating in public space; collective immobility, stillness and silence might disrupt assumed normative patterns of mobility, busyness and noise (Goffman, 1972 [2010]; Lee and Watson, 1993), which are themselves contingent accomplishments.

Erving Goffman's (1972 [2010]) seminal studies of relations in public space illustrate how negotiating the environment and the movements of others is a *coordinated* social activity. He writes that the social actor "is not merely moving from point to point silently and mechanically managing traffic problems; he is also involved in taking constant care to sustain a viable position relative to what has come to happen around him" (p. 154).

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[1] https://mai.art
[2] https://www.adbusters.org

Goffman emphasises the constant, unfocused interpersonal *cooperation* required to manage what he calls "co-presence" in public space.

One of the routinely observable category relations in public space is that between a performer, of some kind, and an audience. There are specific organisations of bodies and space which display this relation in, for example, a street performer or busker drawing a crowd (see Smith, 2016) or, indeed, with street violence, a fight or an arrest, or other public spectacles, which might attract an observing 'audience' of witnessing bystanders, perhaps via CCTV (Heath *et al.*, 2002).

Harvey Sacks (1995[I]: 593-4) tells his students an anecdote about acting as an 'observer', watching behind a one-way mirror, in an experiment where 'patients' (as he calls them) test the microphone in another room. He comments on the following exchange between the 'patients' in the experiment:

A: Turn on the microphone
B: Testing,
A: We're about to start.
B: We are gathered here on this day,

Sacks goes on to suggest that, by engaging in these recognisably 'performance-like activities', the 'patients' introduce an alternative category device, 'performer/audience', in place of 'patient/observer'. The performer/audience pair can be used by people to accomplish an alternate 'partitioning' of parties to activities, through the directing of remarks (or other embodied actions) made by the 'performer' to be (over) heard by an 'audience'.

In this sense, performer/audience should not be understood as formal analytical categories, to be imported *a priori* into analysis by the researcher; but instead found as practical categories, relevant for, and oriented to, members' ongoing activities. We later show how the relevance of category pairs of performer/audience and participant/observer, as resources for viewing what might be going on, shifts with the emergent organisation of the event and, indeed, are 'breached' in our particular experiment. Observing is therefore a practical activity and part of the phenomenon itself to be studied (Popova, 2018).

We focus, here, on *noticing* as a modality of perceptual practice and method used by members to topicalise the potentially unexpected stillness. In this way, our analysis aligns with studies which demonstrate noticing as a collaborative and public practice, embedded in activities such as driving (Watson, 1999; Rauniomaa *et al*., 2018; Laurier *et al*., 2020), visiting a museum and viewing exhibits (vom Lehn *et al*., 2001; Scott *et al*., 2013), or participating in a guided tour (de Stefani and Mondada, 2014). We are also influenced by ethnographic and discourse analytic studies of coordinated bodily action in mindfulness, meditation and movement classes held at monasteries, retreat centres and conferences (Stanley & Kortelainen, 2020; Pagis, 2019; Preston, 1988).

We analyse the bodily practices through which noticing can take place, as distinct from the discursive, verbal or textual noticing practices more commonly studied (Zerubavel, 2018). The above studies attend to how people's orientation and attention to an object (another car, a museum exhibit, a specific plant in a garden) or activity (coughing, laughing) are recognisable and observably oriented to by co-present others. Practices such as turning the head, pointing, slowing of pace, body torque (Schegloff, 1998), stopping, stooping, gazing upward, and so on and so on, can be treated by others as indexing something worthy of attention. Such procedures for noticing are observable not hidden, collaborative rather than individual, and practical rather than perceptual or cognitive. This is what makes such practices *work* as resources and makes them so publicly consequential in practice.

3. Performing 'Being Still' and 'Doing Nothing' in Public Space

One of the best-known examples of a 'freeze performance' took place at Grand Central Station, New York City, in 2007, orchestrated by the *Improv Everywhere* 'prank collective'[3]. This involved a group of 'agents' 'freezing' in the middle of the train station during a very busy period. Ting *et al*. (2013) and Haddington *et al*. (2012) analyse similar events in which groups of people 'freeze' in public space. Ting *et al*. (2013) study an *Improv Everywhere* performance taking place at the 2008 *FutureSonic Festival* in Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens where 20 'agents' 'froze' for nine minutes in a busy plaza. Performers were instructed to be "'creative' but 'natural', 'unconventional' yet 'not silly', anything that looks

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[3] https://www.improveverywhere.com/

a 'little more striking than just standing'" (p. 377). The freeze reported by Haddington *et al.* - which was a class experiment designed, like ours, by academics and students at a university campus (in Finland) - similarly involved a 'playful' (p. 4) disruption to the 'normal' mobility found in a busy university lobby. The students 'froze' and held their 'freeze' for four minutes, similarly to those in the Ting *et al*. study, during an everyday activity.

Haddington *et al.* (2012) found people commonly passed by their freeze performers, as if 'nothing unusual' was taking place, but in such a way that, nonetheless, acknowledged the performance, through their trajectories and subtle glances. Such tactics are often used to normalise potentially unusual or unexpected events or persons through "civil inattention", where a social actor avoids directly interacting with another individual, or group, whilst demonstrating awareness of their presence (Goffman, 1963). This acknowledgment involves a subtle distancing, or denial, indicating the co-present other (or unusual event) does "not constitute a target of special curiosity or design" (p. 83).

The common feature of these 'freeze' performances, and their difference to the event being reported here, is that participants produced their stillness by *striking a pose* in the midst of walking, talking, eating, drinking or pointing. The 'freeze' is framed as a performance - ordinary activities are being 'paused' or held in motion - and this becomes the spectacle to be observed (or not). Thus, the 'frozen' activities are accountably tied to the setting in which they are found. By virtue of the 'frozen' stillness employed in these studies, these unusual events are unambiguously framed *as performances to be watched* (or ignored) by an unspecified, impromptu, mobile, and transitory 'audience'. Ting *et al*. (2013, p. 376) do emphasise how the accountability of the freeze as a performance is reliant upon the on-looking stance of passers-by:

> A freeze becomes an event by the mutually conditionally relevant interactions between the performers' actions and the emergent audience's orientations. Without people noticing and producing some kind of orientation to the frozen's inaction, freezing in place could pass unnoticed and nothing special would be happening.

Yet, in both Haddington *et al*. and Ting *et al*.'s analyses, category relations of 'performer' and 'audience' are largely attributed without analytic commentary, and employed as *analysts'* categories, rather than being treated as occasioned categories and members' resources. By contrast, what is unexpectedly breached in our experiment, as we show below, is the very availability and applicability of categories 'performers' and 'audience' as

an occasioned "standardised-relational pair" (Sacks, 1972) and "omni-relevant device" (Sacks, 1995[I]: 594). The stillness emerging from a collective 'just standing still' and 'doing nothing', by contrast, is less obviously performative and arguably is more ambiguous in terms of the framing of 'what is going on', due to the ambiguous legitimacy of watching ('audiencing') what might appear to be 'nothing'. This ambiguity is at the heart of our breaching experiment.

In what follows, we demonstrate how the apparent unusualness, or ambiguity, of our breaching experiment can occasion, and be produced by, specific bodily practices of noticing, audiencing, and performing/participating. In an ethnomethodological sense, this unusualness does not just emerge; events or people are established *as* incongruous through a range of specific - categorial and sequential - members' practices for "doing incongruities" (Sacks, 1995: 89; Smith, forthcoming). The event appears to be oriented to in terms of what we call, after Goffman (1981), a fluid and (un)focused participation framework. Although this concept was developed by Goffman to describe focused interaction, something of its character can also be observably accomplished by members in and through particular bodily alignments and spatial formations (cf. Kendon, 1990).

4. Materials and Analysis

We analyse video materials[4] taken from two breaching experiments, conducted in March and October 2015. The experiment was given ethical clearance by the Cardiff University School's Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC). Around 150 undergraduate students assembled in a lecture theatre and were given the following instruction:

> Split up from your peers/groups and space yourselves out somewhere in front of [the library/Capitol centre]. Disperse and distribute yourselves around the area. Do not intentionally block passers-by. When it reaches 1pm, switch your phone off or onto 'aeroplane' mode, and put your watch away. At exactly 1pm, stand motionless and do nothing. Drop your normative interpersonal signals. What do you notice? Be receptive. Notice what happens 'internally' and 'externally' and remember it. Pay attention to what is happening in each moment. Let experiences come, let experiences be, let experiences go. At 1.10pm, [Author A] will walk past with an umbrella. Then, stop 'doing nothing'.

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[4] For the full video from the March 2015 Cardiff Central Library breaching experiment, see https://youtu.be/i17TbCpK1Dk ; October 2015 Cardiff Capitol Centre breaching experiment taken from Camera A, see https://youtu.be/cyj6SUVOOKY; for Camera B, see https://youtu.be/dEKZgyQ7oV8

Each student was given two small pieces of paper, which they held in their hands or pockets – one saying "I am doing nothing", the other "I am a Cardiff University student doing an experiment. If you have concerns about the experiment, please contact my supervisor, Dr Steven Stanley on +44 29206 87597" (the latter note was included at the request of the SREC). Students were advised that, if a passer-by approached them and asked them a question, they could choose whether or not to speak and/or to give them either (or both) pieces of paper.

We collected multi-modal materials using a range of devices, including video cameras (the second author was one of the videographers), smartphones, audio recorders, as well as collecting online social media posts in response to the event (on Snapchat[5], Instagram, Twitter). The students and staff who stood still wrote short fieldnote entries immediately after the breaching experiment.

Much could be said about how the above instructions frame the breaching experiment, the students' accounts written in their fieldnotes, and the other data collected as part of these experiments. The differences in instructions between ours' and the *ImprovEverywhere* freeze mission are interesting in their own right; it turns out a lot of activity is involved in orchestrating 'nothing' (for further analysis, see Stanley *et al.*, 2015). But, in this paper, we analyse data taken only from the video recordings from each of the breaching experiments, made from the positions shown below (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Cardiff Central Library (March 2015)

Figure 3: Cardiff Capitol Centre (October 2015)

Overall, we adopt an alternative approach to the default social scientific practice of gathering retrospective accounts of 'what participants really thought was going on' through interviews or, indeed, by analysing accounts recorded *in situ* by the video and audio recorders. These materials are worthy of further investigation, but our primary interest here

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[5] For a Snapchat post on the Capitol Centre breaching experiment, see https://youtu.be/bAyt5vP1pVQ

is with the *bodily or embodied* production and recognition of categories relevant for the viewing and audiencing of the event.

To describe and analyse the observability or visuality of social order in public space, we draw from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and, in particular, membership categorisation analysis (MCA). MCA attends to practices of categorising, deployed in the production and recognition of people's ordinary activities and, significantly, treats categories as *occasioned*, rather than as static or grid-like aspects of 'culture' to be applied to a given situation (Hester and Eglin, 1997; Smith, forthcoming). We attend to members' embodied practices employed in 'doing nothing' and orienting to the event. Our concern is with the careful description of observable activities, which we organised in terms of single cases and collections. These materials were analysed by the authors, and in data sessions and classes with students and colleagues. Our intent is to "give theory a rest" (Laurier, 2010), give "more examples, less theory" (Billig, 2020), and recover immobility, stillness, rest, nothingness, and somethingness (and so forth) in public space as members' concerns.

Methodologically and analytically, our study has a family resemblance to ethnomethodological studies of perception-in-action (Smith, 2019; Hester and Francis, 2003), anthropological studies of vision as a situated practice (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1997), and conversation analytic studies of bodily or 'embodied' conduct (for a review, see Nevile, 2015), all of which analyse video recorded social interaction. In these studies, perception is understood as a practical accomplishment, organised during a member's "project-at-hand" (Schutz, 1962).

5. Doing, and Navigating, Standing Still

Following the briefing in the lecture theatre, staff walked with the students to the venues, where they arranged themselves, before standing still for ten minutes. (The first author stood still too, though off camera). The interpretation of the instruction to 'do nothing' was an initial point of interest in our analysis, and a practical matter for the students. Although we do not describe it here, there was an observable shift between the students 'waiting to do nothing' - or "doing being ordinary" (Sacks, 1974) - and the *collective* bodily adjustments involved in the transition to 'doing nothing' at the pre-arranged time. Upon settling, a

collective stillness emerged. Students discernibly stand still as individuals, yet, through their shared activity, are (at first) somewhat recognisable as a 'group' (see Figures 4, 5, 6, 7 below). As per the instructions, they stood in relaxed stances with arms by their sides, some with hands in pockets, most with a soft forward-facing gaze, in-line with their bodily alignment.

Figure 4: Cardiff Central Library

Figure 5: Cardiff Capitol Centre (Camera A)

Figure 6: Cardiff Capitol Centre (Camera B)

Figure 7: Cardiff Capitol Centre (Instagram post)

The collective presence of the still bodies soon occasioned various navigational practices and methods on the part of passers-by, described in more general studies of pedestrian methods (e.g. Ryave and Schenkein, 1974), as well as in the 'freeze' experiments discussed above. These include versions of "doing being oblivious" (Liberman, 2013), "civil inattention", as well as mobile formations such as "flow files", which are sequentially and categorially organised, in ways similar to a queue (Lee and Watson, 1993, p. 8). Flow file participants must display and recognise relevant membership categories, such as 'leader' or 'next in line', that come with a 'ritual burden' for the setting and maintenance of 'appropriate' trajectory and pace.

For example, a woman pushing a pram (the 'leader') pursues a trajectory through the group, followed by a man on a bike (who comes into line with the woman's trajectory, matching her pace, pushing himself slowly along with one foot) (Figure 8). They are joined by a couple walking together (who maintain their appearance as a "with" (Goffman, 1972 [2010]) and three other people who individually follow on behind. Such commonly observed

mobile practices are employed to navigate through the stationary bodies, in ways that do not explicitly mark the 'obstacle' of the still students as noteworthy.

Figure 8: Flow file

7. Noticing 'Nothing'

It is easy to assume that a group of people standing still in a capital city centre – in the middle of a pedestrianised high street, during the working week, around lunch time - is inherently disruptive or ambiguous, and that this experiment must obviously be a 'breach' of the social order. But disruption, ambiguity and 'breaching' are *produced* (or not) through people's practices of approaching, arriving at, joining, and passing-through the scene. This might involve people observably passing-by, glancing and looking at the scene; what we can gloss as "look-work" (Smith, 2017). We cannot be sure of what passers-by are thinking or (consciously) seeing with their eyes. But we can, however, see a shift of gaze orientation; a re-orientation of their heads is visible, from an alignment with their prior trajectory, toward the still figures. In addition, passers-by may also momentarily pause or stop for varying lengths of time, amid their ongoing activities, before continuing on their way.

We will now describe three procedures people use to produce this scene as a potentially puzzling and ambiguous one.

(i) Looking back

When people walk by and look back, they display a bodily orientation to what becomes a 'noticeable' event. This form of noticing is characterised by a sequentially organised bodily display of attention to the scene. The passer-by walks through the scene, as if there is nothing remarkable taking place, before, at a later point, engaging in body torque (Schegloff, 1998), indicating a subsequent orientation to what they have just walked past, before returning to their trajectory (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Looking back

Looking back allows the person to both navigate through a setting, whilst giving a fleeting glance, which suggests this scene is potentially 'unusual' or remarkable. Their looking back might be taken as a display: for example, they can see this thing that others might also be seeing, and they are not oblivious to it. In this sense, looking back may constitute the scene as subtly strange, or at least notable.

(ii) Slowing and pausing

Around three minutes into the library experiment, a young man wearing a red hoodie arrives, on a trajectory that would have taken him through the scene (Figure 10). He walks toward the still bodies, slows his pace whilst looking around, before momentarily stopping. Walking a little further forward, he turns to his right, slowly steps forward, then stops again. Twisting his body to the left, he pans back to a wider angle, surveying the scene, before walking slowly on.

Figure 10: Slowing and pausing

These practices of noticing commonly feature the use of body torque (Schegloff, 1998). The young man's feet remain aligned with his ongoing trajectory, as he turns his head and body toward the scene. Maintaining the alignment of their feet with their prior trajectory is one way people show their noticing is an interruption, and not a full re-orientation, of their activity in the setting. Lower-body alignment varies from passing-by, to audiencing, to participating (or performing) vantage points, as we will show below.

(iii) Stopping still

A woman carrying a green plastic bag arrives (Figure 11). Similarly to the previous example, the woman slows her walking pace, whilst glancing sideways, looking at the standing figures and the scene more generally. She continues to walk, realigning her gaze with her walking trajectory.

Figure 11: Stopping still (i)

Following the path set by others, who are passing through a narrow space (between the still figures and the wall of the bank), she adjusts her path and looks briefly at the camera (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Stopping still (ii)

After seemingly noticing the camera, she slows her pace, and comes to a stop. She turns her head toward the scene, bringing her feet together, at a slight angle away from her original trajectory. Her upper body is semi-rotated to look over her left shoulder. This pause in walking lasts 4 seconds, during which the woman glances between the area from her left, to the 'middle' of the still group.

Her stopping, combined with glancing, allow a more direct orientation to the scene as a remarkable 'something' than do the previous procedures used by passers-by. In this way, she briefly becomes visually categorisable as an 'audience' member. Yet, this 'audiencing', we suggest, is never fully accomplished, because her feet remain aligned with her original trajectory. Indeed, after the 4 seconds of standing, she resolves her body torque, and gives a second glance at the camera – another inferential resource through which the scene may be oriented to as a remarkable one – and walks on.

8. Audiencing 'Something'

Audiencing may *start* with an initial noticing, but this is followed by a more pronounced and prolonged engagement with the event. In this section, we outline what appears to be the accomplishment of a fluid, embodied, (un)focussed form of participation framework (Goffman, 1981) - oriented not to speech or talk (or speaking and listening), but to a noticeable event. We show how people, who stop to watch the event, may become potentially categorisable as either (or both) *audience-performers* (or participants) in the standing still experiment.

(i) Audiencing

Figure 13: Couple audiencing

One example of audiencing from the library experiment is accomplished by a couple (or, a "with", Goffman, 1972 [2010], p. 19). As the man and woman enter the scene, they re-orient themselves toward the crowd of people (Figure 13). They stroll into the camera frame, stop very briefly in an "L formation" (Kendon, 1990) - with the man at a right angle toward the woman, who is facing the scene - as the man somewhat quizzically glances around, before they both then align themselves in a "side-by-side arrangement" (Kendon, 1990, p. 213). They stand for 12 seconds, with their hands in their pockets, presumably viewing the scene, looking around, seemingly talking about what they are seeing. The man steps forward, pivots to his left, whilst at the same time, the woman starts walking away from the scene to his left, overtakes him, leading them back in the direction from which they came. As they walk away, the man turns his head to the right, toward the still crowd.

This couple are clearly distinguishable, through their bodily alignment and especially their visibility *as a couple*, from the activity that is being audienced; after all, the students were told to "split up" from their "peers/groups", "disperse", and "space" themselves out. There are no students standing in couples. This couple who are "with" each other maintain what were described in the instructions given to students as "normative interpersonal

signals" - or "body glosses" as Goffman (1972 [2010]) had it - which the students were told to "drop", in order to stand still, and thus come across as "doing nothing".

(ii) Loitering

Figure 14: Loitering

Towards the end of the Capitol Centre breaching experiment, a man wearing a suit, holding a newspaper under his arm, enters the scene. The man is seen in the video four minutes previously, observing the scene from the periphery, casually leaning against a bollard. He is then out of shot, until he reappears, slowly pacing (at around one step per second), with his hands in his pockets, around the still bodies, strolling towards the left of the frame, making several subtle, what seem like monitoring, glances, as he walks (Figure 14). His trajectory brings him parallel with a couple pushing a pram and two other people passing-by. From the viewpoint of the camera, the four pass to the right of the woman with the bag (described above), who form a flow file when passing between other passers-by and the still bodies. The man strolls to the left of the woman with the bag, who has stopped to briefly watch the event, who in turn momentarily becomes an obstacle for him to navigate around.

This man appears not to be 'passing-by' but, instead, doing something like loitering, in an apparently anticipatory manner. He reappears in the shot, 23 seconds later, walking back to where he was previously. As he walks, he performs a self-groom, raising his hand to scratch his chin, covering his mouth and rubbing his nose, before putting his hand back in his pocket. He glances to his left, towards the people standing still, continuing his trajectory before turning left to face the still people, momentarily coming to something of an abrupt stop, aligning his body to view the 'event'.

By interspersing looking at the still students with gazing away at 'nothing' in the middle distance, conducting an extended self-groom sequence, and continuously moving as he looks around, the man - through the non-committed stance arising from his 'hovering' around the periphery of the collective of still bodies – may accountably be attending to the

event as being noticeable, whilst simultaneously suggesting this is an unremarkable non-event. He comes across as a casual or partial spectator. Yet, as we show next, when he comes to a stop, his bodily conduct produces a more committed stance as an 'audience' member, whereby he simultaneously (and paradoxically) looks more like a 'performer'.

(iii) Audiencing-performing?

After the man in the suit performs the self-groom, and whilst still strolling from left to right (as described above), a man wearing a blue coat appears on camera, walking, with hands in pockets, towards the scene from the right hand side, on a trajectory that would bring them into close proximity with one another. Whilst approaching the event, the man in the blue coat engages in a series of glance orientations to different elements of the scene in quick succession. Firstly, to the left, back up the street, then to the camera, then to the still bodies. As he comes to a stop, he looks once more at the camera - and possibly at the man in the suit - before returning his gaze to the people standing still, aligning his lower and upper body fully with his gaze, thus adopting an *audiencing-cum-performing* position (Figure 15).

As the man in the blue coat comes to a stop, the man in the suit has performed his brief stop and orientation to the scene described above. The stop lasts for under one second, as the man in the suit apparently adjusts his position in anticipation of the projected trajectory and stopping point of the man in the blue coat. The man in the suit slowly pivots to his right, takes three steps, before pivoting left, back toward the scene, and settling into an audiencing position, behind and slightly further away from the man in the blue coat (Figure 15).

In this highly coordinated sequence, the men appear to subtly work together to manage their coming into temporary alignment as an observable *audiencing-performing pair*. The man in the suit appears to orient to the man in the blue coat's movements and spatial positioning, through apparently monitoring and adjusting his walking trajectory and body position. From these audiencing-performing positions, they both stand still for 11.5 seconds, with their hands in their pockets. As a result, during this time, they appear similar

to – even indistinguishable from – the crowd standing still. The pair can be categorised as being both (or either) audience/performers, or indeed participants.

This shared stillness is suspended when the man in the suit begins patting his trousers and then jacket pockets, seemingly searching for a phone. He takes his mobile phone out of his inside right pocket and proceeds to type on the screen, glances up to a point left of the frame (toward the bank again), looks back down and types again, looks up again before returning the phone to his pocket. Whilst the man in the suit is typing on his phone, the man in the blue coat begins to move off from the audiencing position, by pivoting his left foot away and turning his upper body to his left. As he begins to move his right foot to follow, he appears to give and briefly hold, for around a second, a glance to the camera, before reverting back to his former audiencing stance, which he holds for a further 14.5 seconds.

Figure 15: Audiencing-performing?

After the pair of onlookers' 14.5 seconds of audiencing/performing, the first author appears at the right of the frame, and opens an umbrella (the pre-arranged signal for the immobility to end and the students to disperse). It appears that the man in the blue coat hears the umbrella opening (the sound is audible on the video), as he turns his head slightly to his right, and notices the first author walking briskly past him on his right and directly through the middle of the group.

The still students start to disperse, beginning with a student to the left of the frame, and the man in the blue coat appears to attend to this, tracking her movements. The man in a suit turns to his left, at a right angle from his previous position, and faces towards the direction of the camera, bringing his right hand up to scratch his forehead in a circular motion. He then continues to self-groom, rubbing his chin, before putting his hand over his mouth and holding it there. As he does so, he adjusts his lower body, stepping to his right slightly, making a quarter turn back toward the scene.

9. Discussion & Conclusion

Sociologists and interdisciplinary scholars have turned their attention to immobility, stillness, and rest (Bissell & Fuller, 2011; Callard *et al.*, 2016). This article studies immobile stillness empirically, building upon the emerging sociology of 'nothing' (Scott, 2018, 2019). We respecify 'nothing' as a members' concern, and describe some bodily practices of attending to an apparent 'nothing', that work to turn it into a 'something'. By carefully attending to what we might call the lived detail of nothing, we have shown how a potential 'nothing' is practically made into a 'something' through a range of subtle, fleeting and (most crucially) *situated practices*. In doing so, we have demonstrated how the normality of everyday life can be practically accomplished and momentarily disrupted.

Our breaching experiment was designed to subtly disrupt the expected, shared, and 'normal' uses of public space in a contemporary city centre environment. In public space, mobility can become normative - with stopping, standing, and stillness becoming 'deviant' activities (Hall and Smith, 2013). Prolonged stasis can be policed and pathologised, particularly so for 'problematic' categories of person – such as rough sleepers, loiterers, or protesters – in spaces primarily geared toward circulation, work, and consumption. Standing still in public space can be treated as a special and subtly disruptive event, and can further expose taken-for-granted features of the routine production of our social world. Ethnomethodologically speaking, our breach thus demonstrates the need to avoid "culturalism" (Hester and Eglin, 1997) in the assertion of the relevancy of categories for members, and the emergent, contingent, and autochthonous (Garfinkel, 2002) accomplishment of social order.

There were various, more explicit, responses to a group 'doing nothing', which we have not analysed here, including people appearing to find the stillness distressing. Indeed, in the 2015 experiment at the library, the police arrived, and we later discovered workers in the city's CCTV control room apparently interpreted the event as the beginnings of an anarcho-syndicalist protest (signalled by what they reportedly witnessed as black and red umbrellas, being held by the 'demonstrators', who were standing in the rain). But, equally, and perhaps more commonly, the collective, silent stillness was also ignored entirely, and thus normalised as being "nothing special" (Haddington *et al.*, 2012; Ting *et al.*, 2013).

We have aimed to avoid theoretically juxtaposing, reifying, or resolving, a constructed tension between, say, mobility and stillness. Stillness is common in public space, for example, whilst waiting for a bus, people organise their bodies and positions in highly specific, indexical, and accountable ways (Ayaß, 2020). For sure, by being still and 'doing nothing' the students *potentially* breach the forms of accountable, embodied practices of everyday urban mobility and more common forms of stillness. But quite what is being breached (if anything) and, indeed, whether the event is treated *as a breach, in the moment*, is itself ambiguous and contingent. Moreover, any potential 'breach' also demonstrates the emergent, occasioned and radically local character of category relations of people, such as performer/audience and participant/observer.

Beyond potentially breaching or disrupting the operation of the standardised relation of performer/audience and participant/observer in public space, our experiment also potentially disrupts categorial distinctions of nothing/something, doing/non-doing, being/non-being, and commission/omission, proposed as part of a sociology of nothing (Scott, 2018, 2019). Scott (2019) categorises 'doing nothing' as an act of conscious, intentional commission, and 'non-doing' as an act of omission, which lacks conscious intention. Yet, the students, who are silently standing still, are somewhat paradoxically *doing nothing* – with all of the potential ambiguity and contrariness this phrase implies. Their stillness and silence, and 'dropping of interpersonal signals', may be variously characterised, in multiple ways, as: nothing special, a special something, an irrelevant presence, a notable absence, an active 'non-doing', or indeed a passive 'doing nothing'.

On the one hand, the still, silent students might be seen to be actively resisting (or withdrawing from) the mobility, movement, speed, noise and consumer habits of city spaces. In this sense, they are making a public statement, and thus 'doing something'. Just their act of *conspicuously not shopping and consuming on a high street* might be taken as 'breaching' social norms. Yet, on the other hand, the students are also taking part (perhaps minimally, passively, or reluctantly) in a breaching experiment: a university lecturer-imposed task, where the lecturers are 'experimenters', and the students' participation is ostensibly 'voluntary'. Any glosses of immobility, stillness and silence as 'resistance' (or 'nothing', or 'something', or somewhere in between) should become the objects of careful

analytical attention, and re-specification, rather than solely theoretical speculation.

We recommend breaching experiments as fascinating sociological methods and fruitful pedagogic interventions. In increasingly austere, straightened, and constrained times, breaching experiments can afford profitable ways of simultaneously doing and teaching sociology with nothing; or, rather, very little, and perhaps not much more than a creative, mischievous, and anarchic spirit. In turn, such experiments provide opportunities for students to act as participants/researchers in a practical, experiential and 'live' sociology, whilst also to collaborate as co-researchers - and as co-authors too, as is the case in this article (similarly to Haddington *et al.*, 2012) - with academics in actual research that might also be 'fun'. This is very much in keeping with the playful counter-cultural spirit of the original breaching experiments used by Garfinkel as tutorials to teach what is ethnomethodological about ethnomethodology.[6]

Sociologists might also be inspired to study, or even adopt, the strategies and tactics of performance artists, anti-capitalist demonstrators, 'subvertisers'[7], social justice and environmental activists, whose interventions increasingly involve or promote immobility, stillness and silence as peaceful and non-violent tactics of direction action, protest and resistance.

For example, during the period of writing this article, the first and second authors employed led a "meditation demonstration" with colleagues and students as part of the 2018 University & College Union (UCU) strike, protesting cuts to pensions, as a tactic which spread via online platforms to other UCU branches. Union members' plight, and withdrawal of labour, were poignantly and powerfully drawn attention to through this intervention, where still and silent bodies were recruited *en mass* to make a collective point, and attract public support (Figure 16; see also Stanley, 2019).

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[6] It is important to highlight that whilst they might breach certain social norms and expose certain taken-for-granted background assumptions, breaching experiments may also (sometimes simultaneously) perpetuate and reinforce other norms and assumptions, such as the power dynamics of the 'lecturer-student' relationship, along with wider university hierarchies and research practices. As such, breaching experiments are not necessarily always counter-cultural practices of resistance. For a discussion of these points, along with explanation of the related ethical issues involved in assigning breaching experiments in university settings, see Stanley et al. (2015).

[7] https://www.adbusters.org/

Figure 16: UCU Meditation Demonstration[8]

There is great further potential to employ the methods and analytic sensibility of this study to investigate politicised demonstrations, or non-politicised events, in addition to a range of public and semi-public social gatherings involving seemingly similar activities (e.g. urban meditation retreats, Remembrance Day, climate protests). Such a programme of study, which cultivates ethnomethodological and conversation analytic eyes (and ears) - and indeed bodies – may well yield significant insight and major implications for understanding the practical accomplishment of participation in contemporary public, institutional, and political life more widely.

Yet, as we were finalising this article, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) spread across many countries worldwide, prompting government measures of quarantine, "lockdown", and "social distancing". Stillness and silence fell upon previously busy and noisy cities, towns and neighbourhoods, becoming newly common features of previously populated places. The silence of cities, due primarily to the absence of commuters and shoppers, is being remarked upon, topicalised, and discussed across public and private spheres. People are questioning mobility practices that had become routine. Walking on a pavement, entering a shop, or going to a park are now no longer taken for granted matters, but potentially risky - even life threatening - occasions.

The lockdown measures are exposing and exacerbating existing inequalities, injustices, and forms of oppression, which might have previously been considered "unremarkable" (Zerubavel, 2018; Zizek, 2020). Stillness is still being marginalised, albeit in new ways, and the stillness of marginal groups is still being pathologised, stigmatised, and targeted by a range onlooking 'observers' (Hall and Smith, 2013). Videos are being posted on social media to 'shame' people and groups for sitting on benches, having barbeques, or simply lying on the grass. The 'new normal' of COVID-19 – public shaming of people for "breaching" lockdown rules, the wider reconfiguring of the moral order of mobility, and placing of bodies in space – is still unfolding as we write. #BlackLivesMatter activists who are

[8] https://tinyurl.com/y7mje37o

protesting the police killing of George Floyd, lying still in the streets and on bridges whilst shouting "I can't breathe", or taking a knee for eight minutes and forty six seconds, are also being stigmatised for protesting collectively during lockdown.

Moving forward, as our uncertain, complex, and troubling future unfolds – which is often characterised by its rapidly accelerating pace of change (Rosa, 2013) - we encourage sociologists to engage in careful, detailed, and situated studies of the bodily activities involved in the range of occasions where immobility, stillness or silence are occurring (whether watched, surveilled, or policed). Conduct lively and provocative experiments to expose what is being taken-for-granted. In doing so, we can go some way to making something out of what might, at first glance, appear to be nothing.

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