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# Urban research in film using walking tours and psychogeographic approaches

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*This article investigates urban change, making films from research approaches which use ethnographic walking interviews, public walking tours and psychogeographic techniques. The case study focuses on Newport, South Wales, UK. Using this example, I explore the longer-term impacts of the (mostly) state-led reconfiguration of British towns and cities from the late-1950s to the mid-1970s. Contemporary film for this period sets the context and links to Guy Debord's concept of psychogeography, psychogeography in film, and associated walking techniques. This article builds a methodology from these principles, where one-to-one participant-led walking interviews – both outdoor and using online maps – reacquaint people over aged 55 with earlier periods of their biographies. These approaches reveal deeply-held memories and articulate feelings relevant to the present and future. This article develops and analyses practice, offering ways to film walking tours to sensitivity present and explore place narratives over time: firstly, working with community activists to reveal the politics of local housing; and secondly, a commission with a theatre company where three artists follow a specific walking route which explores urban change and rights to the city. As towns and cities face challenges these approaches offer visual methods to engage the public in place making.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article considers what walking and psychogeography can bring to making films about urban change from the everyday or street view perspective (de Certeau 1984). The substantive focus is the longer-term impacts and experiences of the (mostly) state-led reconfiguration of British towns and cities from the late-1950s to the mid-1970s. This writing is based on a case study in and around Newport, Wales, UK – a small city of approximately 160,000 inhabitants. Though the original research participants were aged 55 and above, this study is not limited to urban nostalgia (Adams and Larkham 2016) as

the walking tours and publicly-available film are designed to prompt public engagement with the future of places.

I introduce the context of the late-1950s and 1960s through contemporary film. This foundation leads to definitions of the term *psychogeography* and associated walking techniques such as the *dérive*. A short introduction to traditions of psychogeography in film demonstrates different approaches to landscape and the individual. Drawing on this, walking methods are presented as a means to allow people to reacquaint themselves with earlier periods of their lives; revealing deeply-held memories and feelings. From this empirical data public walking tours are curated to construct a place narrative through sharing fragments from individuals' stories alongside other material.

The paper then proceeds to detail findings from creating two publicly-available videos with professional filmmakers: firstly a public walking tour where community activists represent local housing issues; and secondly the practice of creating a longer walking tour focused on Newport city centre, and using this framework to work with artists as they walk through public space and create street theatre. These examples pay significant attention to the ethics of inviting people to walk public places (Giddy and Hoogendoorn 2018). The conclusions summarise this exchange between disciplines (Murray 2021) and the contribution to future urban investigation that making films from these walking tours can offer.

## THE CONTEXT OF URBAN CHANGE: ENTANGLING FILMS, PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND WALKING

### Filming Urban Change

Even before World War II public information films made people aware of town planning in Britain (Gold and Ward 1997). Significant urban change happened between the late-1950s and mid-1970s: Local authorities

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in England and Wales purchased and cleared 1.1 million dwellings (Yelling 2000). For example, extensive poverty and housing in poor repair in Bootle, Liverpool, UK are represented in 35-minute BBC documentary *Morning in the Streets* (Mitchell 1959).

By the late 1960s, however, urban policy seems to have changed places. The 50-minute BBC film *I Love this Dirty Town: A Personal Plea for the City* (Parks 1969) shows the wrecking ball being taken to terraced houses, multistorey concrete structures rising, and many more cars on the street. The voiceover by Margaret Drabble cites Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, bemoaning people moving from towns and cities like London to suburban housing estates and rural locations. The film features short interviews with activists, architects and designers who worry that small independent shops were moving out of town. A fuller picture was given by Ian Nairn's architectural films, which depict British villages, towns and cities between 1967 and 1978. Nairn often focuses on the cost of modernising the Victorian-era built environment, showing: 'what is at stake by giving the audience a sense of what it feels like to live there' (Flanagan 2018, 119). Overall, films such as these sought to capture a very dynamic urban space.

### Psychogeography and the Dérive

A variety of new approaches emerged to understand the new urban forms that the aforementioned films revealed. This included the Lettrist International and Situationist International, pioneering psychogeographers who made the case for walking approaches to explore places (Pinder 2005, 388). Guy Debord defined psychogeography in 1955 as 'the study of the effects of the geographic environment on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (cited in Pinder 2005, 386), which he developed in 1956 by introducing a walking technique called the *dérive* or drift. These walks could be designed to challenge dominant social and spatial structures and subvert their representations – such as using maps of one place to navigate another (Coverley 2018). Such drifts provided 'provocations and critique of the relations between culture, politics and everyday life in the 1950s and 1960s' (Sidaway 2022, 553).

This turbulent period was important to Debord and other Situationists as they sought to protect an integrated 'unitary urbanism' sense of the city they considered an underlying principle of historic places such as Paris. Spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre observed that the Situationist mission failed; noting that Debord accepted the disappearance of such unity during the

1960s (Ross 2002). Though applications of the *dérive* in geographical research are generally limited (Pierce and Lawhon 2015), the latter theory has been resurrected by different authors and researchers in more recent decades as a key Situationist method, used not least to explore cities once again. For example, Rebecca Solnit (2014, 212) interprets the *dérive* as 'walking ventures into the unknown', Tina Richardson uses them to explore Leeds University campus, and Arnold (2019, 2) sees the value of drifts which are playful and explicitly 'an attempt to get lost in the city'.

### Psychogeography in Film

Besides walking, psychogeography has also focused for filmmakers. For example, a 2014 festival in New York's Museum of Modern Art was devoted to film featuring Vienna, ranging from a 1906 film to more recent refugee arrivals from the Balkans (Isenberg 2014). In many ways this visual media collection is an extended study of the emotional state of this city, especially as it also makes links to Sigmund Freud. Elsewhere, Mollaghan (2015) writes that the Irish rural landscape influences the emotional and psychological states of the main characters in the film *Silence*. Sarah Petrovic (2013) focuses on less romantic urban spaces as she considers psychogeographical and attendant spatial practices in *This is England* and *Somers Town* by English filmmaker Shane Meadows. Petrovic links Meadows' work to the thinking of spatial theorists such as de Certeau and Lefebvre, arguing that he creates characters whose interactions with space signify specific ideologies and identities, and that their social status also influences styles of walking.

### Psychogeography in More Recent Decades

Besides embracing film, the political was central to the type of psychogeography pursued by Debord and the Situationist International. British psychogeographers from the 1970s onwards, such as Iain Sinclair and Will Self, also take on urban planning (Sidaway 2022): observing everyday life by deploying the solitary flâneur on a walking drift. This pedestrian approach resurrected the focus of Baudelaire in the nineteenth century and Benjamin in the early twentieth, and even the lone walker in earlier writing by William Blake, DeQuincy, Robert Louis Stevenson and Daniel Defoe (Coverley 2018). Indeed, the latter author inspired the fictional Robinson character created by filmmaker Patrick Keiller (Clarke 2007).

There is a particular interest in solo walks to uncover and foreground the 'mundane and habitual' (Ingold

2010, 70). Yet, despite the flâneur producing many useful understandings of urban life over time, this perspective has been criticised as being too often practised by middleclass males (Pinder 2005; Solnit 2014). Though female flâneuse appears in recent urban visual studies (Arnold 2019), group walking has expressed greater diversity and inclusion (Mason et al. *forthcoming*; Springgay and Truman 2022).

Finally, the liminal nature of psychogeographical walking, with its resistance to conventional practices, chimes with Doreen Massey's argument (1999) that space offers simultaneous time-related connections, what she refers to as a 'multiplicity'. Non-conventional (ised) walks can reveal multiplicity of space; allowing us to experience the lifeworlds of others (Vannini 2015) as people reflect on topics such as work, leisure or shopping and consider their own mobility, age, and health.

## RESEARCH: FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

### Study Focus

My research has focused on the changing built environment in the immediate decades after World War II – a time of much urban change as noted above – and on the specific geographical setting of Newport, a city of 160,000 people in southern Wales, UK (ONS 2023). I principally focus on people aged 55 and above, the oldest born in the 1930s and the youngest in the mid-1960s. Their lives span many societal, cultural, and economic contexts as during the participants' lifetimes Newport's economy was reinvigorated around a new steelworks which opened in the early 1960s (South Wales Argus 2012). Albeit to a lesser degree, accounts also noted experiences of the present and the anticipated future.

### Methodology: Context

My methodology draws on the practices noted above for exploring spaces in psychogeographically imaginative ways via walking and film. As walking research is now widely utilised, this tradition first merits further introduction. Here I consider approaches designed to study urban change, particularly long-term relationships. Whilst there are many examples of one-to-one walking interviews to explore urban issues, the walking tour as a method to explore spaces in groups seems to have been used less often. This presents some opportunities for development which are taken up in the case study. The final element of the methodology is to consider how films are made from walking practice.

### *Walking with Others to Reveal Past, Present and Future*

Walking as a form of ethnographic research features widely in *Visual Studies* (Bratchford 2018; Edensor 2010; O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; Pink et al. 2010). Published work elsewhere includes working with artists (Springgay and Truman 2017), urban issue (Pierce and Lawhon 2015), queer and anti-racist praxis (Springgay and Truman 2022) and political movements (Mason et al. *forthcoming*). The walking participatory interview (Evans and Jones 2011) involves 'go-alongs' (Carpiano 2009) where participants lead researchers on a route chosen by the former. Such experiences can be 'experimental, contingent, eventful, and becoming' (Yi'En 2014, 212) as spaces sometimes trigger unexpected feelings and memories. Whilst the participant leads the walk, questions from the researcher focus the conversation on specific times or issues such as urban politics.

Walking interviews can enable co-constitutive understandings of people and place Springgay and Truman (2017). Walks with asylum seekers living in the East Midlands, England, UK, helped explore 'here and now, near and far, the real and the imaginary' (O'Neill and Hubbard 2010, 49). Adams and Larkham (2016) explored deeper connections with Birmingham and Coventry, UK, using 22 individual go-along interviews with older residents. Participant considered the long-term impact of 1960s urban renewal; revealing how new urban forms replaced substandard housing and to redevelop de-industrialised spaces and repair severe damage during World War II. Notably, whilst some participants remembered their young selves embracing change, others lamented the loss of cities with tight neighbourhoods. Birmingham also features in research which explicitly refers to place making (Jones and Evans 2012). Here researchers accompany individual older participants on foot. They consider future regeneration plans for neighbourhood which were the locations of long-demolished houses, pubs and places of work. Physically being in these locations demonstrates the theory of multiplicity (Massey 1999) as seemingly-empty streets act as portals to memories and feelings. This case study also records mobile meetings with GPS maps and photos. Although walking is inherently multi-sensory (Pink, Mackley, and Moroşanu 2015) researchers typically focus 'most of the time on the discursive audio data' (Springgay and Truman 2017, 33). There are potentially many more dimensions to walking practice. Indeed, Springgay and Truman (2018) argue that walking can be combined with methods such as sensory mapping and visual forms such as photography and film.



A second data collection method involves participants revealing their mental maps of locations; often places not visited for many years (Bonnett and Alexander 2013). This method relies on participants verbalising their responses to the interviewer as they follow a line in their mind (Ingold 2010). A visual variation of this approach couples video chat platform Zoom with Google Maps and the more immersive Google Streetview. Though this method offers no chance to touch, smell, or for the body to move, the maps offer ‘records of past perceptions’ (Rodaway 1994, 140). People move from the vertical frame in Google Maps to the horizontal as they enter Google Streetview and explore detail. In many ways this enables de Certeau’s desire to relinquish the ‘view from on high’ and explore the everyday and mundane (cited in Pinder 2005, 402). Moreover, participants can visit many places within one hour. Of relevance to visual outputs, and providing the participant gives consent, Zoom makes video recordings of such interviews. These raw materials can be used in edited films and inspiration for walking tours.

Assembling fragments from different stories into a format that represents a particular place, and across time, can be challenging – as explained in the context of heritage walks and place making in Newcastle, Australia (Markwell, Stevenson, and Rowe 2004). Pierce and Lawhon offer *local literacy* as a means to bring sources diverse as observational walking, interviews, and focus groups into ‘an embodied understanding of the scales and rhythms of an urban context that frame the data we collect’ (2015, 656). I now present a range of ways in which tours have embraced the embodied nature of walking (Springgay and Truman 2017) to both set the context and explore places.

### *Walking Tours*

Walking tours invite participants to link stories to spaces so that place biographies can be uncovered (Yi’En 2014). They ‘are designed to elicit responses to specific, predetermined places’ (Evans and Jones 2011, 849). Tours can be event oriented (Springgay and Truman 2017), such as the *Walking to the Laundromat* project where audio materials extended the understanding of place beyond the visual and tactile. In a later paper the latter authors write about walks having a *speculative middle*, describing how researchers embrace the immanence of the relations and future provocations which may emerge (Springgay and Truman 2018). Whilst such openness is important, taking the public to the street requires paying sensitivity to issues such as prostitution (Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015) and (not) giving voice to local people (Giddy and Hoogendoorn

2018). For example, an Institute of Urban Dreaming walking tour around a housing estate in Salford, UK, was described as being ‘informed by oral histories, policy, political and architectural theory’ (Bratchford 2018, 395). The latter author recalls how the walk allowed him to *visualise the invisible* through photography. However, in a reversal of the norm to protect anonymity, one local resident actively invited photos to expose the state-led destruction of social housing. There are always questions about whether to visit specific streets and whom to engage.

Morag Rose is a co-founder of the Loiterers Resistance Movement (LRM) in Manchester, UK. She writes about psychogeography and how regular group walks have:

... added layers of narrative and engaged in a critical conversation about who and what Manchester is for. They also build solidarities between those who walk together (Mason et al. [forthcoming](#))

In one concrete example Rose describes how the LRM used a walking expedition to draw attention to a threatened public right of way, and how its loss would disturb the rhythm of place (Pierce and Lawhon 2015). Purposeful use of walking tours appears in the concept of *roving focus groups* (Inwood and Martin 2008), where students walk together in groups and explore the University of Georgia North Campus, USA. Framed within a discussion about white privilege and racialized landscapes, the teachers in this case noticed how students referenced and debated evidence from the place itself as the focus groups walked the campus. Students on a walking tour of the University of Leeds Campus, UK, produced drawings of locations important to them (T Richardson 2014). This latter example demonstrates extensive collaborative walking artistic practice to represent people and place (O’Neill and Hubbard 2010). Issues of anonymity on walking tours can be different for artists compared to the earlier cases. For example, one street theatre exponent argues that ‘changing the names of people and places does not do justice to the involvement of those we work with’ (M Richardson 2015, 629). This case underlines the importance of valuing the efforts of people who share stories and also their time.

### *Making Film from Walking Research and Walking Tours*

Taking urban social and political issues raised by ethnographic and biographical walking, and by walking tours specifically, can involve expressing them through film. Walking approaches permit a ‘shift from thinking

about methods as processes of gathering data toward methods as a becoming entangled in relations' (Springgay and Truman 2018, 204). As such, films made from walks provide a 'fuller picture of the poetics and politics behind the process of doing fieldwork' (Yi'En 2014, 212). They address gaps in written research accounts: 'always missing the tone in which a particular phrase was used, a reassuring gesture of welcome, a cold look of disdain, or an unfinished sentence foreclosed by a shrug of the shoulders and a downcast gaze' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2013, 285). Visual forms can help ethnographic work 'reach a wider audiences, beyond academic communities' (O'Neill 2012, 158). Film can potentially allow viewers to feel similar things as those present (Pink, Mackley, and Moroşanu 2015). For example, movement can be conveyed through mobile camerawork and views of people's backs and legs (Hammett 2018). These latter approaches can also represent the already-noted issue of reciprocity and collaboration between participants and other partners (Rodaway 1994). The latter author asks whether and how the spectator – better described as a participant on the walk – and the process of production can be made clearly visible in film.

### *Methodology: Use in This Project*

Walking interviews, walking tours and filmmaking were deployed in the research reported in the rest of the paper. I present a case study comprising three elements investigated within two linked projects. The first case explores a walking tour which results from one-to-one walking interviews (n = 10) with, as already noted, people aged 55 and above with long-term connections to Newport produced alongside collaborations with community activists. The resulting walking tour was a public form of urban ethnography (Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015) and the full account is explored in my PhD thesis (Singleton 2021). The second case develops the *dérive* concept to explore a significant case of urban change in the centre of Newport. Archive materials, digital walking interviews (n = 3) and other data are connected with a walking line. The third case takes this latter *dérive* through Newport and describes how a psychogeographic film is made through a collaboration with a theatre company. This example brings artists to the forefront as the leaders of the walking tour. Their playful and provocative actions explore how the 'present becomes available when we have accounts of the past and visions of the future' (Pink, Mackley, and Moroşanu 2015, 358). This third example questions and subverts relationships with public space (Pinder 1996).

## THE CASE STUDY: RETHINKING WALKING TOURS AND MAKING FILM

This case study focuses on the methods and practice of producing visual outputs in sufficient detail to demonstrate rigour, self-reflection, and transparency (Gandy 2021). A significant aim is to consider how walking tours are designed and produced, embracing walks that explore politics (Mason et al. *forthcoming*), representation (Giddy and Hoogendoorn 2018), and visual collaborations with others (Murray 2021).

### **Walking Through the Politics of Local Housing**

This walking tour was part of a four-hour long public event, hosted in partnership with a homecare provider on Lodge Hill Estate in Caerleon, a neighbourhood of Newport. Rather than making an artistic film, filmmaker Owain was tasked with capturing the event. My PhD research budget only allowed for a three-minute edited film. However, the following account benefits from analysing the raw footage, which was supplied in a low resolution and with a water mark which prevented commercial use. The 25 members of the public who attended were given the option not to be filmed, which was taken up by one individual.

We gathered inside the homecare provider's main office. I led an oral account which broadly summarised findings from walking interviews described earlier. Substantively the narrative was of housing estates built from the late-1950s and through the 1970s. The venue, built within a precinct of shops, was itself part of a place designed to house the workforce of a major steelworks opened in Newport during 1961. As the original inhabitants had become older their housing and other support needs had changed. The tour which followed this introduction was designed to explore this place in more detail. We left the venue and walked through the estate and towards the centre of Caerleon. I explore one element of the tour, which was guided by a man in his seventies called Chris. He worked a housing officer from the 1960s to the early 2000s and was now involved in local politics.

Chris showed us examples of the social rental housing built in preparation for the steelworks. Further along the same street he discussed how 'right to buy' policies had led to many such homes being sold in the 1980s. This walk gave me the chance to add some details shared by previous interviewees. For example, one could tell which houses had been sold by the shape of the gates and the types of front doors. As we walked further Chris took us to the former University of South Wales campus. This place closed in 2016 and had been subsequently sold to a

housing developer. There was strong feeling for this location as it had housed Newport College of Art, including a film school and pioneering photography school (McWilliams 2009). There had been a significant and successful campaign to stop the art deco building on the site from being demolished. Many people on the walk were already aware of the site's significance.

Chris stopped the group next to where more than 200 mostly three-bed 'executive' houses were proposed. He stood in the centre of a circle with Owain filming to the left (Figure 1). A 30-second-long segment of the raw video demonstrates the performative and political nature of the experience.

I introduce the planned development to the walking group and posit the following comment: 'This site here, in an ideal world – the type of housing built here – could respond better to the actual local need.' The film shows me giving this last sentence a few moments to breathe as I wait for Chris to add detail. His head had been bowed listening to my words. After a moment or two I completed the unfinished sentence with the words 'question mark ...' Chris looked over towards me and said: 'That's a lovely phrase: *a bit better!*' The film shows his fists clenched and gesturing to start a sparring match with me. He said 'Go on! Give it some welly! Give it a bit more.' Connecting with earlier writing about who speaks for people and place on a walking tour (Bratchford 2018; Giddy and Hoogendoorn 2018), I felt it better for criticism to come from somebody with an ongoing stake in this place. Chris then took over and said: 'What is being proposed for here is totally out of sync with anything that the local community needs. There you go. What do you think of that? The passion with which Chris delivered these words prompted a wave of feeling and immediately the circle of people was nodding in agreement. This emotive exchange was unrehearsed and is an example of how being in the middle can open up experimentation and (in)tension (Springgay and Truman 2018). Furthermore, it exemplified the multiplicity of response to place (Massey 1999), especially as Chris allowed participants to envision possible futures.

Despite extensive filming, the finished video (Treetop Films 2019) lasts three minutes. However, its brevity, inclusion of feedback from attendees, link back to earlier research participants, and use of captions is a strength in presenting walking tour as a social research methodology. Moreover, it portrays a given location and its relationship with people (Mollaghan 2015; Petrovic 2013). The film also highlights collaboration with the homecare provider and could reach audiences such as policy makers (Gandy 2021). From my own perspective,

the portability of this film was of use in funding applications for further research.

Missing from this example was the creative and conceptual possibilities of the *dérive* (Solnit 2014) and film itself. The next section explores my subsequent work to plan a new walking tour. I present the steps taken to curate a walking which explores city centre change, using archives materials and additional research.

### Creating a Walking Tour: A *Dérive* Which Explores City Centre Change

To complement the suburban story of Caerleon, I explored changes to the centre of Newport. Demand for leisure, shopping and public services was connected to the steelworks being built in the 1950s and opening in the early 1960s. The steelworks would employ over 10,000 people and led to various other development built in the centre in Newport. I researched archive material at Newport Reference Library, such as the newspaper microfiches and photographs of the redevelopment through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Of interest to a potential walking *dérive* was Dock Street, which opened in 1842 and connected the Town Dock northwards to the market and administrative centre of Newport. During the 1960s a 200-metre-long section of this road was erased and built upon to create concrete structures including the Kingsway Shopping Centre, Newport Central Library, a theatre, car parks and administrative buildings. Though smaller in scale than the modernisation of central Birmingham (Adams and Larkham 2016), the erasure of Dock Street felt reminiscent of the discontinuities and breaks to the 'unity of atmosphere' highlighted by situationist Abdel Khatib around Les Halles in Paris (Pinder 1996, 416). Following the line of Dock Street would be a playful *dérive* (Solnit 2014) as it would attempt to follow a previously important route erased in the 1960s. Of note, Newport has some heritage of public walks. In 1839 nearly 4,000 Chartists marched to Newport campaigning for the vote (Wilks 2017). The 'Newport Rising' is commemorated every November with a torchlit public walk. An immersive walk featuring the Windrush generation in Newport was recently trialled (Unboxed 2022).

I led a small walking group along the line of Dock Street as it was in the early-1960s. Being playful, and faithful, to that old route we went through Newport Central Library and up some stairs to a dead end. We retreated then wandered through a shopping centre to find ourselves high up on a multistorey carpark. Though this elevated position was perhaps antithetical to the approach of





FIGURE 1. The pavement discussion © Jo Haycock, 2019.

seeing life from the street (de Certeau 1984), this view confirmed how much Victorian-era infrastructure had been destroyed in the 1960s and 1970s. This felt like a subversive act and linked to ‘a method of cartography that questions totalizing organisations of power and at the same time enables subjective voices to appear from underlying postmodern topography’ (T Richardson 2014, 131). I decided to source subjective voices which could feature in a walking tour. With permission from the author, I used some audio interviews called *Moving to Bettws* (Hammett 2017). These featured people who had lived on Union Street, joined to Dock Street, which was demolished to make way for the 1960s shopping centre, and who were relocated to a new housing estate in the countryside. I also completed some spatially-led video interviews on Google Streetview (see earlier technique). One featured a woman called Pat, who moved to Newport in 1963 in her mid-twenties – data source available (Singleton 2023). As Pat journeyed around the city she recalled deeply-held memories and emotions (Bonnett and Alexander 2013; Edensor 2010). For example, how a planned inner by-pass road would cut through a working-class neighbourhood. Though the highway scheme was eventually defeated, many long-standing residents gave up hope and sold their properties to rental-oriented landlords. This state-sponsored assault on residents was reminiscent of the human costs of place-making and regeneration, such as the displacement of existing populations (DeVerteuil 2012; Watt 2013). Again, this account demonstrated the multiplicity of space (Massey 1999).

Having done this research, I was in a position to schedule and lead a public walking tour. Rather than following the example set by Chris, bringing in other people with knowledge and personal experience as walk leaders, I collaborated with artists in a performative way

and for them to guide psychogeographical urban explorations (O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; Pinder 2005; Pink, Mackley, and Moroşanu 2015; Springgay and Truman 2017). In the following case the Dock Street story was interpreted through a 2022 commission with a professional theatre company who helped to produce and make a film.

### Creating Street Theatre to Complement the Walking Tour

Through Swansea University I commissioned Tin Shed Theatre Company, based in Newport, to manage a small team (performance artists, a producer, dramatist, and a filmmaker) who would bring street theatre to the walking tour. Michael Richardson describes street theatre as taking ‘stories back to the meaning they derived from – beyond the confines of the Ivory Tower, outside the bounded walls of words in books and texts – and through spoken word and performance’ (2015, 621). During the first meeting we created a cinema-style space and ran a ‘data session’ (Hindmarsh and Tutt 2012, 58–61). Our visual data included an early 1960s film which charts Newport’s fortunes changing with the huge new steelworks (South Wales Argus 2012). I outlined the *dérive* along Dock Street using contemporary 1960s photographs and maps to show the homes and buildings which were demolished. We also explored the positive side of the changes from the *Moving to Bettws* audio recordings. For example, the actors and producer learned how new suburban homes were warm and allowed people to entertain their friends. The artists were given scope to create representations which would be poetic, dramatic, and provocative (O'Neill 2012).

The producer and performance artists became ethnographers themselves as we visited different





FIGURE 2. Revisiting Union Street © Aled Singleton, 2022.

locations along the Dock Street route. A filmmaker who documented the process accompanied us. We visited the car park built over Union Street where one person wrote chalk digits on the ground to signify house numbers (Figure 2). As one performer talked to camera another walked on to the scene to simulate a street populated with people. These small details would enliven a walking tour and collectively we were ‘writing the city’ (Murray 2021, 180) in broad terms. The process of charting this development stage included filming reflective interviews between myself and the team. These clips were edited and shared with the team shortly after the session.

After this development stage we sketched out a storyboard. Partly to focus on quality, and due to the impending funeral of the Queen, the walk would be made into a film rather than a public event. Additionally, we digitally mapped the route for others to follow (Springgay and Truman 2018). The narrative was introduced by a fictional character leading our psychogeographical explorations (Petrovic 2013; Sidaway 2022). Actor Matt offered a public relations man in a suit selling the future of Newport. Though the precise era that he represented would be ambiguous, the film would clearly show how the past had influenced the present time. Matt’s character would be playful and not promise to be an expert, such as the earlier example of Chris representing the politics of local housing. For ethical reasons, we ruled out the car park built over Union Street (Figure 2) as somebody had recently

jumped to their death from that location. In itself this sad event added a new layer of meaning to that space. I now introduce two sequences of the street performances. In effect each sequence can be seen as a small *dérive*.

The first case involved Matt and clown artist Bob. Bob would fight for the rights to the city – for more see Lefebvre’s concept (Marcuse 2009). They explored whether artists could perform in the privatised space of the shopping centre. Their piece was staged in a narrow alleyway: a 50-metre-long portal from Victorian-era architecture to the shopping centre built over Dock Street. Of note a public square at the heart of this latter scheme became a private space after being redeveloped in 2016. Bob’s clown character tried to pass from the public to private space but was stopped by Matt – the latter who bridged between past and present. After a short scuffle Matt took Bob on a journey to what he calls ‘the future.’ In an improvised dialogue Matt invited Bob to touch the bricks as the late nineteenth century buildings give way to the ‘sturdy’ modern bricks – see Figure 3.

Passing through this confined space was reminiscent of Fisher (2016) who cites filmmaker David Lynch’s use of curtains and doorways to change a mood. In psychogeographical terms this *dérive* demonstrated how the unity of atmosphere changes (Pinder 1996; Ross 2002). The edited film is a visual ‘representation of space’ (Gandy 2021, 618) as the performance was repeated



FIGURE 3. Bob and Matt in the alleyway © Aled Singleton, 2022.

from different angles. Without doubt, this sequence was a case of the artists and filmmakers leading the process.

The second artist-led example involved artist TEMMAH carrying *A Little Space Gallery*, a transparent backpack designed to look like a miniature exhibition room with a floor and hanging space on the walls. Shown in Figure 4, she placed a toy excavator and colourful clay houses to represent the long-demolished Union Street. On the walls she pasted 1960s plans of Bettws estate and 1969 newspaper cuttings relevant to the Kingsway shopping centre. This walk would focus on the lives of working class people whose voices are often missing from heritage tours (Markwell, Stevenson, and Rowe 2004). At



FIGURE 4. A Little Space Gallery © Aled Singleton, 2022.

the beginning of her walk she explained that the gallery was designed to 'reclaim public space for artists and for people.' Her walking body, the gallery and place were becoming enmeshed (Springgay and Truman 2017). Though the film crew and I accompanied her, she mostly walked alone as a kind of flâneuse (Arnold 2019) and purposefully stopped people and asked them to look at the mobile gallery.

People did not always want to engage and so we improvised at certain points. For example, we talked to camera in a documentary style about the tiny press cuttings in the gallery. One particular example concerned the first female President of Newport Chamber of Trade, appointed in April 1969. At one point we met two young women. The colourful houses prompted a question to TEMMAH, who explained that we were roughly on the site of Union Street and so outlined the story of people moving to Bettws in the 1960s. One of the young women realised that her family may have made a similar move. This was an important opportunity to start a conversation about how places change.

Indeed, the present-day city centre has multiple challenges. Newport has more empty shops than the average UK city, the multiplex cinema never reopened after the pandemic and, in 2021, the department store Debenhams shut its doors forever (Wales Online 2022). Though Newport was quiet on the day of the filmmaking, potentially as it was the Sunday before the Queen's funeral, a key element of TEMMAH's approach was how the walking galley of objects started discussions.



This technique is more gentle walking tour contribution compared to performative pieces created by Bob and Matt or the more direct example set earlier by Chris.

I now conclude this article by returning to precedents and openings for psychogeography and film, and explaining how my collaborations with activists, artists and filmmakers offers some new approaches.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has considered the practice of walking tours, psychogeographical approaches and filmmaking as a visual form of storytelling to explore urban change. This has aimed to offer approaches which not only look to the past but embrace multiplicity of space (Massey 1999) and enable conversations about the future. My methodology develops data gathered through go-along walking conversations (Carpiano 2009; Evans and Jones 2011), coupled with online interviews, oral gathered by another researcher, and contemporary documents. The resulting walking tours are a method to present and interpret ideas with the public (Bratchford 2018). These tours are influenced by traditions in psychogeography (Coverley 2018; Sidaway 2022), such as the creative use of the *dérive* (Arnold 2019; O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; Pinder 2005; Solnit 2014; Springgay and Truman 2017). There are three main ways in which these collaborations advance urban research with visual outputs.

Firstly, the community event shows how walking tours can be used to present and discuss political issues in a specific place. The film recorded the tensions and response-ability of being in the speculative middle (Springgay and Truman 2018) as Chris talked, and participants learned, about a housing development that was potentially soon to happen. This technique has potential to voice the concerns of local people (Giddy and Hoogendoorn 2018).

Secondly, the story of Dock Street inspired a *dérive* which extends heritage walks by bringing in working class voices (Markwell, Stevenson, and Rowe 2004) and revisiting places erased in the name of redevelopment (Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015). As a team the producer, dramatist and artists had freedom to create characters who guided psychogeographical walks (Petrovic 2013) and made street theatre (M Richardson 2010). The resulting performative pieces are subversive renderings of urban space (Pinder 1996) which make theatrical use of public space (illustrated in Figure 3) and explore the important issue of rights to the city (Marcuse 2009).

Thirdly, the walk with TEMMAH was an example of 'concepts in-the-making' (Springgay and Truman 2017,

28) as the highly visible mobile gallery on her back drew people towards her. The objects started conversations with the public and revealed the multiplicity of space (Massey 1999). This playful approach can potentially break down barriers to participation for research with visual outputs (O'Neill 2012; Rose 2016). Of note, TEMMAH became an ethnographer doing walking research, with the film (Thomas 2022) documenting her interactions with the public.

Taken altogether this case study builds on previous research that takes a longer view on place making using walks and film. Contemporary challenges for towns and cities in the UK are different to the post-war decades. Newport has lost major shops and its cinema (Wales Online 2022). Moreover, modern-day Newport has a well-established Black population. The recent *StoryTrails* arts project (Unboxed 2022) created immersive experiences in Newport around the influence of the Windrush generation. This foundation of stories is promising. Indeed, both Black and youth perspectives must be part of future place making efforts. I hope such exercises will include thought-provoking walking tours to encourage public participation and films which explore how relationships with places continue to evolve.

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